

THE UNION SEMINARY MAGAZINE

VOL. XXIV

DECEMBER-JANUARY, 1912-1913

No. 2

THE BRISTOL ASSEMBLY.

BY A. B. CURRY, SR., D. D.,
Memphis, Tenn.

The Bristol Assembly is declared by one who saw it to have been "an unusually strong and forceful body of men." The equivalent of this is said by somebody of every General Assembly that meets, from which we may conclude that the mental comparison is not with other Assemblies of our Church, but with bodies of men outside our Church, and that our Assemblies are uniformly composed largely of able men, which conclusion is doubtless true.

It is not the purpose of this paper to give a record or a history of the acts of the fifty-second General Assembly at Bristol, for this has already been well done by our religious press, and besides the writer had not the privilege of being a spectator of the Assembly in session. It is intended merely to note, and to comment upon, some of the more important matters which were before the Assembly, and there are so many a selection will have to be made. Moreover, all that is written, is written from the viewpoint not of an ecclesiastical expert, but of a practical pastor in the field.

The Bristol Assembly was pre-eminently a business body; it made record time, at least for recent years, finishing its work in exactly one week, and yet slighting no important matter. Those at all acquainted with deliberative bodies will understand how much of this dispatch must have been due to the presiding officer, and we are prepared to believe what was claimed for him.

that Dr. Clyce was an ideal Moderator. The Assembly inherited much important business from previous Assemblies, having to receive and act upon the reports of no less than six ad interim committees besides having before it much new business of equal importance. It promptly disposed of all this business, and itself handed down only one matter to the next Assembly, appointing only one ad interim committee.

The opinion has been expressed in some quarters that the ad interim committee business has been somewhat overdone by recent Assemblies, and it does seem that the previous Assembly appointed or continued an unusually large number of such committees. But one is convinced that no mistakes was made when he considers the able and painstaking labors of these committees, the wise conclusions arrived at, and the immense amount of time saved the Assembly in having these weighty matters brought before it in a thoroughly digested form. Ad interim committees, like some other bodies, are as good or as bad as the men that compose them, no worse and no better.

REPORTS OF AD INTERIM COMMITTEES.

While on the subject we may note the action of the Assembly on the reports of some of the ad interim committees. One of these was on the Basis of Representation in the Assembly. Strange to say, from earliest times in our Church the basis of this representation has been the number of ministers in the constituent Presbyteries, securing, however, representation to each Presbytery, no matter how few its ministers. It is remarkable that such a principle should have received the approval of the founders of American Presbyterianism, and still more so that it should have passed muster with that prince of Presbyterian constitutionalists, Dr. Thornwell, and his able associates and successors in the work of revising our Book of Church Order. It would have been far more in accord with the genius of Presbyterianism to have made the basis of representation the combined number of ministers and elders in the Presbytery; this would have, in a measure, recognized the parity of rulers in the church; but to make the basis purely clerical, ruling out elders

and private members, smacks so much of clericalism and leans so far toward prelatical customs, we are amazed that we have all stood for it these many years. It was appropriate that a Presbytery from the Synod of Thornwell and Adger should take the initiative in seeking to bring about a change. The Presbytery of Enoree overtured the Louisville Assembly to take steps to make the basis of representation in the Assembly popular instead of clerical. As now, each Presbytery, however small, is to have one minister and one elder in the Assembly, but additional representation will depend on its number of communicants instead of its number of ministers. This overture was referred to an able ad interim committee, of which Dr. Cannon was made chairman, and this committee unanimously recommended that the Assembly approve of this change and send it down to the Presbyteries for their advice and consent. This was accordingly done, and this amendment is now before the Presbyteries.

It might have been well if Enoree Presbytery while at it had made a clean sweep and moved also for a change in the basis of representation in Presbytery and Synod. It is not in accord with the principles of true representative government that a church of a thousand members should have no more representation in Presbytery and Synod than one of a hundred or even of ten. This evident inconsistency of our Book is commended to the thoughtful consideration of the brethren of Enoree, who so far seem to be so successful in winning for their constitutional views the approval of the church at large.

The ad interim committee on the Assembly's Home and School had before it a delicate and difficult task, which seems to have been discharged without prejudice or favor. It ought to be established in the minds of all by this time that the Assembly does not propose to run educational institutions of any kind except in the prosecution of distinctively missionary work, such as Stillman Institute and the schools at foreign mission stations, and as soon as possible even these should be, and doubtless will be, turned over to other agencies. It is opposed to the settled policy of our Church for the General Assembly as such to establish and run colleges for its membership in this

country. Moreover, it is a practical impossibility for it to sustain a college worthy of the name on the small contributions made annually to a minor benevolent cause; the attempt can only lead to financial and educational failure. Nor is there any need for the Assembly to enter upon this kind of work, where there already exist so many excellent church colleges for boys and girls, to say nothing of the State schools. In view of the fact that the Charlotte Assembly of 1898 abolished this Assembly college plan at Fredericksburg, and that, too, against the eloquent and earnest pleadings of one of her most distinguished and beloved sons, it seems strange that the friends of the Home should have come back to the Assembly ten years later with the identical college proposition, involving a repurchase of practically the same property which it had renounced; and it is still more strange that the Assembly should have yielded to their solicitations. The result was inevitable; financial embarrassment, and a second repudiation of the college by the Assembly, attended perhaps by some financial loss. It is to be hoped that the matter is now settled for all time.

There is reason for believing that the entire plan of such institutions as the Assembly's Home and School is based upon a wrong principle. The purpose of such institutions is noble in the highest degree, and must appeal to every one, viz., the care of the loved ones of those who have fallen or are still fighting at the battle front. This duty and privilege our Church has always recognized and has attempted to meet in her scheme of relief. But the wisdom of establishing a Home and School for ministers' widows and ministers' children alone may be questioned. In the first place, it is a species of class legislation which does not set well on the minds of many, and then it must be subject to the evils which always accompany class segregation, cutting off in a measure the chosen class from the advantages of free intermingling with all other classes of people. There is no sufficient reason for placing the orphans of our ministers in a different orphanage (if they have to go to one, which is rare) from that to which the orphans of our elders, deacons and people go under circumstances of similar need, nor is there any manifest advantage in ministers' children being in a home or a school

to themselves, which would outweigh the narrowing process which is almost sure to follow. There is no good reason why the excellent widows of our ministers should be congregated in one community; the gracious influence of their lives needs to be distributed throughout the Church, and the care of the Church for them and for their children could be as effectively given in various homes and schools as in one. No one denies that the Home and School, even with the college added, has done a good work; but the question is, has it done the best work in the best way?

The ad interim Committee on Marriage and Divorce extended its labors through three years, and evidently sifted to the bottom the important questions committed to it. These were two: (1) Does our confessional statement on Marriage and Divorce need revision? (2) What should be the policy of our church in heathen lands touching the receiving or retaining polygamists in the Church? There was no difference of opinion in the committee nor in the Church on the second question, viz., that "polygamy is both unscriptural and unconfessional, and the practice of the Church must conform to this doctrine."

On the first question there was a so-called majority and minority report, although both appear to have received the same number of signatures. The one favored submitting the question of change in the Confession to the Presbyteries. The other was opposed to any change in the Confession and submitted such a clear and admirable paper on the whole subject of scriptural marriage and divorce that the Assembly adopted the entire paper, with the recommendation based upon it, to leave the Confession unchanged. The action of the Assembly on both these points will probably be satisfactory to almost the entire Church.

There is one point on which we could wish the able committee had spoken, viz., What should be the attitude of sessions toward unscriptural divorcees, who have been divorced and remarried by the State or by other agency recognized by the State? For example, a person has been divorced by the State on non-scriptural grounds, and has been remarried by the State to another party; or the *guilty* party in a scriptural divorce has been remarried by the State to another; if this person, living in adul-

tery according to the theory of the Church, although living in legal marriage according to the theory of the State, applies for admission to the Church, shall the session refuse to receive such an one unless the second marriage is renounced? If it does refuse to recognize this marriage and refuse to the applicant church membership, does it, or does it not, place our Church in the same attitude toward State legislation on this subject which Rome assumes, when she denies the validity of any marriage performed by the State or by any agency outside of her priesthood? Is not the principle the same in each case, viz., a refusal to recognize the State's authority in the matter of marriage and divorce? On the other hand, if the Church receives such a person, unrepentant, into membership, her testimony against unscriptural divorce and marriage is seriously impaired. This is a practical question which confronts our sessions and pastors, on which we wish Dr. Boggs' able committee had given us light.

The Committee on the Feasibility of Founding a Great Presbyterian University at Atlanta or elsewhere reported that they found in the Church practically no demand for said university, and let the subject down easy by referring the need of such an institution to the Executive Committee on Christian Education.

Dr. Johnson's Committee on Romanism has brought not only our Church, but all Protestant churches in this country, and the citizenship of the United States generally under lasting obligations for the exceedingly able paper presented to the Assembly as its report. It is clear, free from passion, convincing. The Assembly did well to order the publication of the greater part of this paper in pamphlet form for distribution among our people. It is doubtful if there is anywhere else accessible to the American people in such compact form such a fund of facts about Romanism gathered from absolutely authoritative sources. It is a well-known fact that statements hurtful to Rome are promptly denied by its partisans as lacking authority; and this authority is not always accessible to the average speaker or writer. For all of its statements the committee quotes from the highest Roman authorities, largely from the so-called infallible popes themselves, in many instances giving first the original Latin for the schoiars, and then the translation into English. There is

absolutely no escape from the conclusions of the committee, and it is to be hoped the pamphlet will soon issue from the press and be given wide circulation, not only among our own people, but among the rank and file of Romanists, thousands of whom are in profound ignorance of the fact that the very theory of the papacy is in necessary and eternal conflict with many of the cherished principles of American citizens, both Roman and Protestant. In addition to this pamphlet, its author ought to be asked to prepare an abbreviated and popularized form of it, reducing it to small tract size, as far as possible, for universal distribution among the masses of the people. It would be a most effective way of carrying out the Assembly's recommendation to meet the menace of Romanism in part by "the dissemination of knowledge." When this knowledge shall have had its perfect work, the Church will be ready to act more wisely on the third division of Dr. Johnson's most admirable paper.

THE ELECT INFANT CLAUSE.

This famous clause as it now stands in Chapter X, Section 3, of our Confession of Faith is as follows: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth." An agitation for some kind of change in this clause began twelve years ago, and, like a famous ghost of old, "will not down." The desire for a change is based in part upon the fact that a great many minds interpret this language as meaning that some infants dying in infancy are elect and some are not elect, and that only the former class are saved.

There is a good deal of inference in all this, but many minds, especially non-Calvinistic minds, think this inference reasonable, and even necessary, and so it has come to pass that a belief in infant damnation has been charged against all who hold to this clause of the Confession. It is believed that this charge is unjust and hurtful to our Church, and that all possible ground for it should be removed. There are many also who sincerely believe that the Scriptures teach that all infants dying in infancy

are of the elect and are saved, and that if the Confession is to speak on the subject of dying infants at all, it ought to speak the whole scriptural truth.

The Bristol Assembly approved and sent down to the Presbyteries for their action the following amended form of the much debated section: "Being elect all infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ." A careful study of the history of the efforts in our Church during the past twelve years to effect some satisfactory change in the wording of this clause in our Confession, is very interesting and will show that the present proposed amendment has little prospect of adoption by a constitutional majority of the Presbyteries; for, whilst it differs somewhat in language, it does not differ at all in meaning from other amendments which have been repeatedly voted down by former Assemblies or by the Presbyteries or by both. For example, as early as 1900 the Assembly voted down an overture asking it to take steps to have the clause amended so as to read: "All infants dying in infancy are elect infants and are regenerated," etc. This is the same in substance as the amendment now before the Presbyteries; later unsuccessful amendments have had the same meaning. Unless, therefore, there has been some considerable change of sentiment on the subject the amendment now before us will go the way of all the rest this coming autumn and spring.

The continued agitation of this subject is not strengthening our Church within or without; the effect of it is positively injurious and it ought to cease. It is a strange controversy. If it were over some fundamental doctrine for which we have a "thus saith the Lord," we could understand the stubbornness of the contention. But both parties are contending over a mere inference from Scripture, a good inference, it is true, yet nevertheless only an inference. The conservatives object to any change which will make the Confession say or imply that *all* infants dying in infancy are elect and saved, on the ground that Scripture is silent on this point. But Scripture is equally silent on the present statement or implication of the Confession, viz., that *some* infants dying in infancy are elect and saved. There is not a single passage in the whole Bible that directly affirms that

any infants dying in infancy are elect and saved, simply because the Holy Spirit did not see fit to speak through inspiration on the subject of dying infants and their election. Therefore, anything that may be said in our Confession must be an inference from statements which are found in Scripture. The brethren opposed to any change invariably assume that we have a "thus saith the Lord" for the present statement of the Confession, but they have never produced it. The framers of our Confession give certain proof texts to sustain this clause; but on examination it will be seen that they sustain it, not by direct affirmation, but by inference only.

Now the inference that some infants dying in infancy are elect is "good and necessary." But it is the same kind of inference, and depends on the very same Scriptures and the same Scriptural conception of God and of the federal headship of Christ, and of the scheme and scope of his atonement for sin, from which is drawn the inference that all infants dying in infancy are elect and saved. If it can be proved from Scripture that any infants dying in infancy are elect, then by the same Scriptures it can be proved that all of that class are elect; indeed, the latter would be the easier and more logical task, and the proof for both is quite as sure and conclusive as for some other things in our Confession, e. g., infant baptism and the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week.

There are three ways in which this hurtful and unreasonable controversy may be brought to an end: *First*, by dropping the matter and letting the Confession remain forever as it is. But this is hardly to be expected when a majority of the Presbyteries have gone on record as desiring some change. In the Presbyterian Church there is an ineradicable feeling that the will of the majority should prevail.

Second. By eliminating from the Confession Section 3, the bone of contention. Some seem to think if this were done the pillars of our Calvinistic System would fall. The truth is, they would not be touched, for the contents of this clause are absent from both our Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and both of these contain our cherished system unmarred. However, this section has accomplished a noble purpose in the world. When it

was framed and put in our Confession, Rome was teaching, unrebuked, that all unbaptized children dying in infancy were barred from heaven. Section 3 rescued myriads of infants from limbo and opened to them the portals of heaven; it took them out of the unfeeling grasp of a narrow priesthood and placed them under the infinite, electing love of God. This was in part its purpose, but it would have accomplished this purpose more fully and effectively if it had plainly and unequivocally placed all dying infants under this electing love; and they had as much Scripture for one as for the other; they would not have had to change a single proof text. Rome is still teaching her horrible doctrine of infant damnation, and it would be well for us to strengthen our testimony against it, rather than to withdraw it.

Third. By the minority agreeing to some charge which would accomplish the original purposes of Section 3, which by agreement of all would be in accord with the Scriptures, and which, at the same time, would satisfy the majority. This is the best way, the wise and reasonable way.

Now what were the purposes of this section? To testify against false doctrine, as stated above, but primarily to define the way in which *invocables* become the subjects of effectual calling. The chapter of which it is a part is entitled "Of Effectual Calling." Section 1 tells how redemption is applied to elect adults or *vocables*, viz., through God's effectual call "by his word and spirit." Section 2 affirms that in this call man is passive "until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call." Section 3 tells how Redemption is applied to infants and others who are incapable of being called by the outward ministry of the word, i. e., to *invocables*, viz., they "are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth." It ought not to be impossible to find language in which to express the purposes of this section, which all could adopt without violation of conscience, if not of judgment. Brethren of the minority may be asked to sacrifice their judgment for the common good, but not their conscience. Something like the following as a substitute for Section 3 ought to be possible of acceptance with all: "In the effectual application of the redemption purchased by

Christ to infants and to other persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word, the use of the word or of other ordinances of the Church is not necessary; but they are regenerated and saved by Christ through the spirit who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth."

This, like the Scriptures, makes no specific mention of dying infants and their election; it is silent on this subject to the full extent that Scripture is silent. At the same time it conserves Scriptural Calvinism, for Section 1 has already affirmed that the redemption purchased by Christ is effectually applied to the elect and to them only. It testifies against Romish error, showing that the salvation of infants does not rest on Church ordinances, and it states in simple language how invocables are saved. It states what all believe to be in accord with Scripture teaching, and does it in phraseology taken almost wholly from our Confession.

In the discussion of this and similar questions, let us not forget that the language of our Confession is not inspired; that the Westminster Assembly laid down the axiom that "Councils have erred and do err," and that it made no claim to being an exception to the rule. We do well to respect the wisdom of the fathers, but an undue and often unreasoning adherence to the tradition of the fathers is not Protestant; it is Judaistic and Roman. Protestantism is bound only by Holy Scripture and holds that new light may break forth from its sacred pages as the years go by. Brethren point to the splendid works achieved by our Church under our Confession as it is, and they have been splendid, indeed, for which we thank God. But this is not necessarily a valid argument against any changes. The old time scythe and cradle reaped many a splendid harvest of grain which fed many generations of noble men, but this is hardly a valid argument against the use of the McCormick reaper. We should never let the good become the enemy of the best.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS.

In addition to the proposed amendment to the Confession of Faith touching infant salvation, and that to the Book of Church

Order touching representation in the Assembly already noted, two other amendments to the Book of Church Order were approved by the Assembly and sent down to the Presbyteries for their advice and consent.

One of these has reference to the examination of candidates for licensure. The present law makes it obligatory on Presbyteries to examine the candidate on all required studies, academic and theological. The amendment would give the Presbytery the option of conducting this examination as at present, or of accepting a certificate from an approved college in lieu of an examination in the academic studies, and a certificate from an approved theological seminary in lieu of an examination on the original languages of Scripture and ecclesiastical history. It also permits the Presbytery at its discretion to allow the candidate to discuss "some common head in divinity" in either Latin or English. The amendment changes somewhat the rule touching "extraordinary cases," apparently, but not really, making it somewhat more strict and greatly improving it in one respect, by adding to it a provision covering the examination of extraordinary cases for ordination. The Book as it now stands, says nothing on this last point.

There is much to be said in favor of this proposed amendment. As it is now the examination on academic studies is seldom conducted in open Presbytery, but by committees in private, who report to Presbytery. The same is largely true of the examination on the original languages of Scripture. These examinations are often conducted by men who have themselves grown rusty in these branches of learning, and there seems to be no good reason why a diploma from an approved college or seminary, based on several years of faithful work and careful examinations under skilled professors, should not be deemed the equivalent, at least, of examinations often hastily made, and by committees not thoroughly equipped for it. In a previous paragraph the Book recognizes the importance of the college diploma; the amendment would make it practically useful.

Three hundred years ago the best treatises on theology were written in Latin. It was the ecclesiastical language. If a minister would have access to the treasuries of theological knowl-

edge, if he would add to the storehouse of this knowledge, he must be able to read and write Latin. But this is not true now. Thornwell, Hodge, Dabney and hosts of the world's finest theologians have not written in Latin. Nobody today writes theology in Latin except perhaps the Pope of Rome and his kind, and it is not classical Latin, such as we study in the colleges. There is no sufficient reason why a man should be required to write theology in Latin to enter our ministry. There was once a reason for this, for only thus could he reach the ear of the learned with his message. But were he to write his message in Latin today, he would reach nobody's ear. It is well for him to know Latin for many excellent reasons, and the amendment requires that he know it and be examined on it, but it is more important today that he should be able to defend the faith in strong, vigorous English than in Latin, especially poor Latin.

The weakness of the amendment is in the use of one or two indefinite terms. For example, "Certificate of an approved college." Certificate of what? Of graduation in the prescribed studies? If so, this is satisfactory. But a college or a seminary may give a certificate of attendance merely for a given number of years, or some other kind of a certificate. "Diploma" would perhaps have been a better word, the word already used in the preceding paragraph. But even this might prove inadequate. There are colleges which do not require Latin or Greek in order to graduate even, and Greek is not taught in our seminaries; the knowledge of it is there presupposed. So that it would be possible for a man to have a certificate or even a diploma from both college and seminary of high standing, without having a knowledge of Latin and Greek. The only safeguard against this is the word "approved" college or seminary. Is it sufficient? Another indefinite term is "similar studies." It would be better to specify exactly the required studies, as does the Book at present.

The other amendment sent down to the Presbyteries by the Assembly is one giving Synods and the Assembly the right to commit any cases of trial, except those affecting doctrine, coming before them on appeal to a commission, with or without the consent of parties. The demand of judicial cases upon the time of

the Assembly is often a great burden. Earnest efforts have been made in late years to rid the Assembly of this burden. This amendment is one of them. Like some of the rest it is of doubtful wisdom. It has long been the boast of the Presbyterian Church that its humblest member, if aggrieved, can have his grievance settled by the whole body of his brethren as represented in the General Assembly. It is true, in one sense, a trial by a commission of the Assembly is a trial by the Assembly itself; but in an important sense it is not; for the Assembly as such does not have before it the evidence in the case, and therefore cannot judge for itself. But, if the amendment is to prevail, it seems an unfortunate omission not to make it apply to complaints as well as appeals, in short, to all judicial cases.

BRIEF POPULAR STATEMENT OF OUR BELIEF.

While a Presbytery here and another there were overtureing the General Assembly to make this or that amendment to the Confession of Faith or the Book of Church Order, it remained for a Texas Presbytery to cap the climax by overtureing the Assembly to appoint a committee to write a new Confession of Faith from beginning to end. This is the way the Presbytery of Panhandle wanted the question handled. We imagine the Assembly had some difficulty in realizing that the Texas brethren were in earnest, although accustomed to expect big things from Texas. The Assembly very promptly declined such a herculean task. But out of the discussion aroused, a resolution was evolved and adopted to the effect that an *ad interim* committee of fifteen be appointed, eight ministers and seven elders, "to prepare a brief popular statement of the belief of our Church." It was not proposed that this statement become a part of our standards; the committee will submit the product of its labors to the next Assembly, and it remains for the latter to say what shall be done with it, or what use, if any, shall be made of it.

This action of the Assembly doubtless arose from the widespread need of such a statement. Every pastor knows how often

inquirers of a thoughtful kind, especially those without religious rearing, or brought up in churches other than our own, ask for information respecting the belief and rules of our Church. Up rises a good brother from some rock-ribbed Presbyterian community and asks, "What better book for the purpose do you want than our Confession of Faith?" And another says, "Send them our Shorter Catechism." If any one thinks that our Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, together or separate, constitute a "brief popular statement," he ought to read them over again and then consult his dictionary, especially under the word "popular." This word in the Assembly's resolution does not mean "pleasing" or "admired," but it means "suitable to the common people, adapted to the ordinary mind, not abstruse or technical, easily comprehended." Much of the language, even of the Shorter Catechism, is technical, and only to people raised on it is it easily comprehended, and not to all of them in all its parts. These splendid, logical, closely knit doctrinal standards of ours are intended as a statement of the belief of our Church, chiefly for its officers and teachers, who alone are required to subscribe to them, and for the instruction and teaching of our own children. They are not adapted in language and mode of expression to the great masses of the people ignorant for the most part of the commonplaces of the Bible. We cannot conceive of the Lord Jesus teaching the multitudes, "who were as sheep without a shepherd," after the theological style of our standards. They have their purpose, a great purpose; we cannot do without them; we do not want to change them in any essential point. But they are not a statement of the belief of our Church adapted to the ordinary mind, and suited to the masses of the people. Those brethren whose work is only or largely with Presbyterian families who have been Presbyterians for generations, bred on our standards, ought to have sufficient sympathy with those on the frontier where Presbyterianism is almost unknown, and with those in the cities working in the midst of multitudes from the four quarters of the globe, to be willing for these latter to have for use in their work "a brief popular statement of the belief of our Church" with the imprimatur of our General Assembly on it. Some of us have

in part met the need of inquirers with such works as the "Creed of Presbyterians" by Dr. Egbert Smith; but it is believed the "Creed of Presbyterians" by our General Assembly would be even more effective than that most excellent little book of Dr. Smith's, and others like it.

The committee appointed is a particularly able one. Let a small sub-committee of active pastors and elders in close touch with the masses of the people draught the statement. Let the Seminary professors on the committee make sure of its doctrinal accuracy and completeness, not forgetting to put in a paragraph on our splendid form of government, on which our Confession and Catechisms are practically silent; let the wisdom of the entire committee be employed in perfecting it by elimination and addition, and we shall doubtless have a statement of our belief which the next Assembly can endorse, and send forth to be of untold value to our Church.

THE INTERNATIONAL GRADED SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS.

The modern Sunday-school is a comparatively new addition to the working forces of the Church—something more than a century and a quarter old, it has shown marvelous development since its inception, and in nothing perhaps more than in its methods of instruction. At first, intended only for poor children, the latter were taught reading along with the Church catechism by paid teachers. The teaching soon came to be gratuitous, and confined to religious subjects, the text book being chiefly the Church Catechism. More and more the Bible itself came to be the object of study, the main purpose being apparently to give the children a knowledge of the historical facts and characters of the Bible. This was the era of the old "Union Question Book" series, which is still a childhood recollection to many, and which in its day did excellent service. Then came the uniform course of International Lessons intended not only for children, but for all ages, and designed not only to acquaint the pupil with the great facts of the Bible, but to expound its spiritual truths, and practically apply them to the salvation and to the edification of the pupil. This was an immense step for-

ward which has wrought a marvelous work for the kingdom of God, and made the Sunday-school a mighty power in the kingdom.

These uniform lessons are selected by a committee composed of men carefully chosen by the various evangelical denominations and whose names are known and published to the world. The treatment of the lesson for teachers and scholars is arranged for by each denomination for itself, each choosing its own editors and issuing its own publications, thus securing the scholars against objectionable teachings. The necessity for grading in order to adapt the lessons to all ages is sought to be met by grading the teaching, not by grading the lesson, the latter being uniform throughout.

In recent years some persons high up in pedagogical science have contended that we should have graded lessons in the Sunday-school as well as graded teaching, and cited the day school, in which the child of eight years of age is never given the same lesson as the youth of sixteen, and they claim that the Sunday-school has suffered untold loss from this defective, unscientific mode of grading. Efforts were made outside the International Sunday-School Association to meet the supposed need, but without wide or marked success. Then great pressure was brought to bear on the International Sunday-School authorities to introduce a system of graded lessons into the International Series. Finally they consented, when, behold, such a system of graded lessons was at once presented to them for adoption, full grown as Minerva when she leaped from Jupiter's brain. And apparently they adopted this Minerva, without looking her over any too carefully, and without knowing much about the Jupiter from whose brain she sprang. The approval having been gained, some nebulous body, supposed to be this same Jupiter, set about to prepare a suitable and elaborate treatment of the new "*International Graded Lessons*," and offered it to the various denominations in the International Association, three of whom seem to have accepted it, and they began its publication in their Sunday-school literature. This treatment of the new graded lessons is now known as the "Syndicate" treatment. The les-

sons and their treatment have found their way into some schools outside of the three denominations composing the Syndicate.

But soon the authorities of the International Sunday-School Association found themselves in trouble. Minerva showed traces of her pagan origin, and as for Jupiter, to this day hidden in the clouds of Olympus or somewhere else, he soon showed himself as revealed in the treatment of these lessons, to be in some respects unchanged since the days of Plato and Aristotle. So loud was the protest against these lessons and their treatment that the International Association at the convention in San Francisco sought to improve the lessons by revision, by which some of the objectionable features were eliminated; but the Syndicate treatment is still of the unrevised lessons.

About thirty of our Sunday-schools are using in one or more of their departments these new lessons. This fact, and the possibility that other schools might begin their use, led the standing Committee on Sabbath Schools to ask the Assembly to warn our pastors, Sessions and Sunday-School Superintendents against the use of these lessons. This the Assembly did in the form of a pastoral letter. The letter is a timely one. It would have been better if it had been issued three years ago. The objection to these lessons, however, is not the fact that they are graded. All are agreed that in a graded Sunday-school we must have some system of graded instruction; as to the best system of gradation, this is a pedagogical matter which the Assembly ought not to have been asked to decide, since it is supposed to handle only "things ecclesiastical." Nor is the chief objection to this new system of lessons that it is expensive; it is probably not more expensive than the same system in our week-day schools, which we gladly bear; and in religious instruction our children are entitled to the best, even if it is expensive. Nor is the objection to these lessons in the fact that if introduced into our schools our Publication House would be financially damaged, though this would be a matter of regret to us all. Nor is it in the fact that if used all Sunday-school people will not be studying the same passage of Scripture the same day as in the Uniform Lessons. All sermons each Sunday are not on the same text, yet do they accomplish great good? Nor is the principal objection

to be found in the lessons themselves, for in their revised form, at least, they are all taken from the Scriptures, though it is affirmed that the selections are so made as to give scant space to certain important topics of the Bible. But the real objection is to the treatment which goes along with these lessons. It seems not to be publicly known who compose the self-appointed committee which selects the lessons and furnishes their treatment. It is stated that the "Religious Education Association" of Chicago, founded by the late President Harper, of Chicago University, and the well-known exponent in this country of destructive criticism, has influential representation on this committee. This being the case, we should know what to expect, "for of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes." We should not be surprised, therefore, if we find that a treatment of Bible lessons from such a source is not true to child nature, not true to the Bible, and not true to the Church of God, for whose use it is issued. It is untrue to child nature, because it proceeds on the assumption that all that a child's religious nature needs is development. It is untrue to the Bible because it hides or wrests its meaning; for example, in the treatment of the parable of the Lost Sheep it is said the lesson to be drawn by the child is "Be kind"; and the duty to be urged by parent or teacher is "care for animal pets." In view of the real meaning of this parable this interpretation seems almost sacrilegious. True, the treatment is for very small children, but any child able to take in the story of the parable can also comprehend its beautiful truth, viz., God's love to each one of us, even when we stray. It is not true to the Church of God, for it does not hold forth the historic faith of the Church. It grounds salvation, the only salvation it recognizes, in high ideals, instead of in a crucified, redeeming Saviour; it puts natural development in the place of regeneration, and before it could do any of these things it must repudiate the inspiration of the Bible. It is not affirmed that these errors are apparent in the treatment of every lesson, nor equally in every grade, for different persons prepare the treatment for different departments of the school, but the poison lurks in the whole, especially in the books prepared for the use of teachers, for the surest way of getting the

poison into the child's mind, is through the trusted teacher. It is amazing that these destructive critics should be guiding the religious instruction of the children of the evangelical churches, and when we recall how it was brought about, we are impressed anew with this truth: "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light," and we are disposed to think that he was not far wrong who called these same children of light "God's silly sheep."

As to grading the lessons as well as grading the teaching, there is much to be said in its favor, especially for the lower grades. Say, the Beginners, the Primary and perhaps the Juniors. Our Committee seems to be planning something of the kind, only using the uniform lessons as the text for all grades. It will probably be found in the end that a distinct grading of Bible lessons for the lower grades is best, and that the uniform lessons with graded teaching is all that is needed for the higher grades. But whatever pedagogical system is adopted, two things should be insisted upon. First, the lessons should be selected and treated by men and women chosen by the Church itself; and, second, that no child, old enough to go to Sunday-school at all, is too young to be taught the great central truth of the Scriptures, viz., the necessity and the fact of the redeeming love of Christ.

THE COMMITTEE OF SYSTEMATIC BENEFICENCE.

If any committee ever justified its existence by its deeds it is our Permanent Committee of Systematic Beneficence. Appointed for the first time only three years ago as a kind of venture, to reform, if possible, our cumbersome and very unsatisfactory financial scheme, its second annual report shows it to have become one of the most important and comprehensive of all our Committees. Its achievements have been notable and epoch-making. Under the leadership of that prince of Presbyters, Dr. John W. Bachman, it has led our Church out of the financial wilderness into a land of promise, if not into the promised land. If the scheme worked out by this committee and approved by the General Assembly, shall be adopted by all our

churches and faithfully carried out by them, it will undoubtedly prove to be the most effective financial plan ever adopted, for it was devised by divine wisdom. The heart of the plan may be stated thus: Every church member giving something every Sunday to every benevolent cause of the Church. This is the principle and method of giving enjoined by the inspired apostle when he said: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." It will take time to secure its general adoption by the churches, but if our Church Courts, Synods, Presbyteries and particularly Sessions will be loyal to the Assembly and do their duty, it can and will be done. The committee seemed to realize the importance of securing the general adoption of the plan as speedily as possible and made recommendations, which were adopted by the Assembly, to the effect that under the leadership of the four executive committees, aided by the Layman's Missionary Movement, concerted efforts be made during this year by conferences and otherwise to present to the people the plan and the claims of the cause, and that a special effort be made "to have every church in the Assembly make an every member canvass for the benevolent causes of the Assembly during the month of March, 1913."

The Systematic Beneficence Committee had in a short time done such splendid work, and so much of it, apparently with the acquiescence and approval of the whole Church, that it was something of a surprise to those outside the inner ecclesiastical circle to learn through two overtures, both of them coming from the same Presbytery, that there was dissatisfaction in some quarters with the work of the committee. Judging from the action of the Assembly, this dissatisfaction must have been quite influential or widespread, or perhaps both; for said action was of such a radical nature as to cause one-half the committee to regard it "as subversive of one of the main purposes for which the committee was raised," and at once to resign their places on the committee. The character of these seven men, one of them being Moderator of the Assembly, is such as to make it reasonably certain that they had good reason for their action.

On the surface it would seem that the limitations placed on the power of the committee were small, the chief being taking from it the right to nominate secretaries and members of Executive Committees. It is not reasonable, however, that these level-headed men, and unselfish servants of the Church, five of whom were laymen, should have regarded this alone as such an abridgment of their powers and duties as to warrant them in resigning, alleging, as some of them did, that the action of the Assembly left the committee with nothing practically to do. When we consider the vast amount of things it had done, and its large activities, as shown in its report to this Assembly, we are forced to the conclusion that nominating secretaries and members of Executive Committees was a very small part of its work. We must seek an explanation on other grounds.

This is probably to be found in two features of the Assembly's action: *First*. A censure, or at least an implied censure of the committee. This may not have been intended by the Assembly; indeed, it afterward disavowed any such intention. And yet if words mean anything, the action of the Assembly, to an outsider, certainly implies that the committee, either had already done so, or was in danger of discharging its duties "in such a manner and by such methods as to embarrass the Executive Committees in the work entrusted to them." And that it was laying "upon those committees orders or requirements" which ought to cease. If this is not the implication, why were these matters mentioned? Why was this language used?

Second. A complete change of the status of the committee in relation to the beneficent work of the Church and in relation to the Assembly. It must be remembered that the original ad interim committee on the "co-ordination of the Executive Committees" appointed in 1909, after mature study of conditions in the Church, recommended that "the Assembly's standing Committee on Systematic Beneficence be made a permanent committee with enlarged powers," among them being the duty of conference with the several executive committees, considering and discussing their management, receiving their annual reports and submitting recommendations based on these reports to the Assembly. (Minutes 1910, p. 22.)

It will be seen that these are large powers and responsibilities. But the committee was formed in a way different from any other permanent committee; it was to be composed of one member from each Synod, half were to be ministers and half laymen, and therefore representative of the entire Church. For manifest reasons the Executive Committees are composed of men contiguous to the central offices of these committees, and hence each has representation from only a few Synods. It was thought that a committee on which every Synod was represented would form a medium of information, interest, and inspiration between our beneficent causes and the whole church; that it could take a more comprehensive view of the whole beneficent field and a wiser view of its needs than any one of our excellent executive committees; and that it ought to give the result of its studies and make its recommendations directly to the General Assembly. And let it be remembered, that this Committee was given no direct legislative or executive powers; it could only nominate, not elect; it could only recommend to the Assembly, not adopt and put into execution. For two years the committee wrought under this plan, and the last Assembly said its work was "great," and expressed appreciation of its "valuable services."

At the same time the Assembly took orders which will make it impossible for this committee to do any longer the "great work" it has done in the past. In the first place, it requires the committee to have its annual report printed prior to the meeting of the Assembly, which renders it impracticable for it to carry out the instructions of the Assembly creating it, to receive the annual reports of the Executive Committees by the 22d of April of each year, then meet prior to the convening of the General Assembly, carefully consider these reports and frame their recommendations thereon. But especially it brings back into existence the *standing* Committee on Systematic Beneficence, which for two years had been merged into this permanent committee, and requires the latter to submit its annual printed report to this standing committee, with the result that only such matters and recommendations as this latter committee may approve of will come before the Assembly for action. In other words, the final voice on the weighty subject of the Church's

Beneficence, which reaches the Assembly for its action, will be that of a committee representing perhaps five Synods, appointed by the Moderator after the Assembly convenes, having little opportunity to study deeply the questions involved, instead of the voice of a committee representing every Synod, with at least a year's opportunity for information and study.

It is not sufficient to mention in justification the custom of referring the annual reports of Executive Committees to Standing Committees of the Assembly, for the reason that they are committees whose business is to execute the expressed will of the Assembly, and it is well for their acts to be reviewed by the Assembly through a standing committee. But the power of the Systematic Beneficence Committee is limited to investigation and consequent recommendation and the sole function of the new standing Committee on Systematic Beneficence in the next Assembly will be to make recommendations on the recommendations of the Permanent Committee. Is not this a useless piece of machinery? Would it not be better, as heretofore, to let the recommendations of the Permanent Committee come directly to the Assembly, there to be approved or rejected as the Assembly wills? Or, is the new standing committee intended as a check on the Permanent Committee? If so, were not the seven members who resigned justified in regarding the action of the Assembly as a vote of lack of confidence?

This, however, is not saying that the seven brethren ought to have resigned. The Assembly was doing its best, even if mistaken, and it is written, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head; for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." Besides, it would have been better for the committee to have acted as a whole at a regular meeting. It would have avoided the appearance of hastiness and of a wounded spirit.

The Church will regret to know that the honored name of Dr. Bachman is no longer on the Committee; it must have been at his own insistence that it was left off. It will not be viewed otherwise than as a misfortune, if the splendid work inaugurated by

this committee shall be seriously crippled by any mistakes or misunderstandings.

"A WOMAN POSSESSING SUITABLE GIFTS."

One of the apostolic injunctions reads this way: "Help those women which labored with me in the gospel." This injunction was borne in upon the hearts of a number of brethren during the months preceding the meeting of the Assembly. The women of our Church had done so nobly, raising for all causes the past year nearly \$400,000 through their societies alone, to say nothing of what they gave directly to the Church treasuries, that when they asked help from the brethren to do even greater things, many in the spirit of the apostle's injunction were willing and ready to help them. Others thought the women unwise in the kind of help they sought, and while willing to help them, were not willing to give exactly the help for which they asked. For they had asked that a secretary for woman's work be appointed by the Assembly, and that this secretary be a woman. A number of Presbyteries overtured the Assembly to grant the request, and others overtured that it be not granted. Learned brethren, seeing in this movement a great peril to the Church in general and to the good women in particular, entered the public press with articles and series of articles to show that for woman to hold such a position would be unnatural, unconfessional and unscriptural, and would imperil the old ship of Zion. Other brethren equally learned rushed to the defense. Even the women themselves were not agreed on the subject, some taking one side and some the other, and it seemed as if there would be a stormy time in the Assembly over this subject. But in this the Church was destined to a pleasant disappointment, for never was a threatened storm more completely changed into a placid calm, and it was all brought about by the wisdom of the committee to whom the matter was referred, which recommended that the Assembly, instead of authorizing the appointment of "a woman secretary," authorize the appointment of "a woman possessing suitable gifts" to do the desired and much needed work, which, it was thought would help the women who labored in the gospel. The Assem-

bly so ordered and everybody seemed to be perfectly satisfied. From this we are forced to one of two conclusions—either, in the opinion of some, there is a considerable difference between a “secretary” and “one possessing suitable gifts,” or that the old saw, “there’s nothing in a name,” is a base fabrication. Probably the latter is the right conclusion; anyway, the women get the help they need, and Dr. Grier’s committee can meditate with special pleasure upon the seventh beatitude: “Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

The whole incident is of use as showing the earnest desire of our Church to secure to woman both her rights and her safeguards under the gospel, and the willingness of our splendid Presbyterian women to enjoy the one and to abide within the other.

A number of other important matters engaged the attention of the Assembly, such as the North Alabama case, union with the United Presbyterian Church, membership in the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, Rotary Eldership and Diaconate, and several others, but the space limit assigned to this paper has been reached. It would, however, be incomplete were not mention made of two forward steps taken by the Assembly, which, if heartily carried out by our people, will mark a new era in the material and spiritual progress of our Church.

One was taken in connection with the report of the Committee on the Narrative. The Assembly by this action “directs its constituent Presbyteries to organize and conduct an earnest campaign in each congregation, directed toward four specific ends.” These ends, briefly stated, are: Securing a Scriptural observation of the Sabbath among all people; inspiring every Presbyterian home to a diligent and prayerful training of its members in the Holy Scriptures and our Catechisms; uplifting the social pleasures of our young people and enlisting their energies more and more in the work of the Church; establishing some form of family worship in every home. The Presbyteries are directed to plan for this campaign at their autumn meetings. In this connection the Assembly issues a call to the entire Church to observe Wednesday, October 2, 1912, as a day of fasting and prayer, and humiliation before God, seeking divine strength to carry out the plans. The campaign is to continue throughout

the ecclesiastical year, and the results are to be reported through Presbyterian narratives to the next Assembly. No action of the Bristol Assembly surpasses this in importance and solemn responsibility. What impression has it made on the Church? The Presbyteries will be meeting soon; what action will they take? For our highest Church Court to take action of this kind, calling the whole Church to a day of fasting and prayer, and then for it to be ignored or half-heartedly observed, would be like trifling with most holy things. It is doubtful if such action should have been taken unless the Assembly had reason to believe the heart of the Church was in it, but having been taken, it becomes a test before God of the heart of our Church. May we meet it in a way to receive His approval! Prayer and fasting to be acceptable to God or profitable to us must be from the heart and spontaneous; they cannot be manufactured to order.

The other forward step referred to originated with the Executive Secretaries and representatives of the Laymen's Missionary Movement, and was taken by the Assembly on the recommendation of the Systematic Beneficence Committee. It provides for a systematic effort to raise during 1913-14 for the benevolent work of the Assembly one million five hundred thousand dollars, and directs "that the financial effort be accompanied by an earnest evangelistic effort on the part of all the pastors and members of our Church, with the view of deepening the spiritual life of the Church and bringing the largest possible number of souls to Christ."

These two forward steps of the Assembly fit well into one another, and present a most inspiring program to our Church. We are told that in the present day it is easier to get people to do a big thing than a little thing; we now have an opportunity of trying out this statement. It is a big thing we are asked to do but it is well within the limits of our ability. The motto of the Haystack Missionary Prayer Meeting was: "We can do it if we will." The Laymen's Missionary Movement has added to this: "We can do it and we will." If our Church will couple the conviction of the first motto with the courage of the second, success is assured.

Both of these steps involve tasks which flesh and blood can-

not possibly accomplish. Movements, however, praiseworthy in which the spirit of God is not the mover, do not take us anywhere. How appropriate that the entire Church should enter upon these splendid tasks laid out for her by the Assembly with a day of waiting upon God in fasting and prayer for the presence and power of His Spirit! Of the twelve ordinances established in the Church by Christ the Head, according to our Book, not one is so seldom observed as that of "public solemn fasting." It was to a fasting church at Antioch that the Holy Ghost appeared and said: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." And it was a fasting and praying church that laid its hands on them and sent them away, of whom it is immediately said: "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed." The act of the praying, fasting church came to be at the same time the act of the Holy Ghost. Could our beloved Church put itself in the same spiritual attitude toward God our plans and works would become His, for His would become ours. The Executive Committees and the Laymen's Missionary Movement are to send two hundred and fifty workers in the proposed campaign; can they do better than to give the weight of their great influence and example toward leading the Church to a reverent and heartfelt response to the Assembly's call to a day of fasting and prayer on the 2d of October? But in this as in all similar matters adequate leadership must be sought in our ministers. In a call similar to this the inspired prophet of old said: "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say: 'Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach; then will the Lord be jealous for his land and pity his people.'" Will our ministers rise to the height of spiritual leadership to which the Assembly's voice and the exigencies of the times are calling them?