

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I. THE CONTRA-NATURAL CHARACTER OF THE MIRACLE.

NONE but the maintainers of a rigid process of evolution, enforced by a law of blind, immanent necessity, would deny that man has degenerated from his primitive condition. He has fallen from the estate of holiness and happiness in which he was created into one of sin and misery. That being admitted, it is obvious that the scheme of religion which he originally possessed is now utterly inadequate to his wants. The law which it contained as a rule of action has been violated, and its condemning sentence renders impossible an acceptable obedience to its requirements. So far as that scheme of religion is concerned man is doomed.

On the supposition that God the Moral Ruler were willing to reveal to sinful man another scheme, not merely legal but redemptive, as a directory of faith, a guide of life and a basis of hope, it would be just, if not indispensable, that its credentials should be so clear as to admit of no reasonable doubt. They ought to be not so much deductions from speculative premises however apparently well-founded, as phenomenal facts easily apprehended by consciousness, or immediate and necessary inferences from those facts, and therefore of equal validity with the original data themselves: the concrete results of observation and experience, or good because logical consequences from them. While the revelation itself is to be proved, its proofs ought to be as nearly as possible autopistic.

THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION IN PHILADELPHIA.

BEYOND question the most notable event of recent date, in Presbyterian circles, was the joint celebration by the two Assemblies, North and South, of the one hundredth anniversary of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in this country, which took place in Philadelphia on the twenty-fourth day of May last. In America a hundred years is a long time, and anything a hundred years old is sure to be one of the "oldest inhabitants." The country itself, as to its organized form, is scarcely older. It is a fact not without significance, as every one knows, that the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States were being framed at the same time, apparently on a common model, and were adopted the same year. It is a matter of just pride to the American Presbyterian that his church is as old as his country. All that the most ardent churchman can ask for the antiquity of his church, in any given country, is that it be as old as that country itself. Another fact which made this a notable event was, that the two great branches of the Presbyterian Church in the North and South, through their two Assemblies, looked into each other's faces, clasped hands, and joined their voices in God's praise, for the first time since their separation twenty-seven years before. This was a scene to claim the attention of men, and of which, we may suppose, the angels in heaven were not disinterested spectators. And if we cannot say with one, it was "an event unparalleled in the history of the church," we can all subscribe to the statement of the Southern Assembly, that it was "an event *seldom* paralleled in the history of the church."

A brief narration of the events of the occasion will not be out of place here. It may be said, once for all, that the completeness and perfection of the arrangements, from beginning to end, left nothing to be desired—thanks to the diligence and efficiency of the Committees of Arrangement, appointed by the two Assemblies of the previous year. From the time the Southern delegates left Baltimore (where the Assembly was in session), on Wednesday afternoon, till their return the following Friday, they were the guests of their Northern brethren, who, with a generous hospitality never surpassed, bore all the care and expense of the entire trip, which, as may be readily seen, were not inconsiderable. On Wednesday afternoon a reception was tendered the two Assemblies by Mr. and Mrs. Wistar Morris, at their beautiful villa near Overbrook, where they were also to meet President Cleveland and his

estimable wife. Here the two Assemblies met for the first time. It was a memorable scene. The Northern Assembly, being the first on the ground, formed in two lines, on each side the walk leading from the gate to the house, and between these two lines the Southern Assembly marched by twos to the mansion. They were warmly greeted and loudly cheered by their brethren, who had so deftly and generously captured them. A few hearty words of welcome from Mr. Morris were followed by a speech from Mr. Cleveland, in which he avowed and displayed his Presbyterian birth and training. After a prayer by the moderator of the Southern Assembly, the Doxology, sung by the assembled multitude, and the benediction by the moderator of the Northern Assembly, the delegates were presented to Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland, and then repaired to the bountiful repast which their generous host had with lavish hand spread for them under a large tent on the lawn.

In the evening another reception was given the two Assemblies in Philadelphia, at the Academy of Fine Arts, at which it is estimated that not less than five thousand persons were present to do honor to the occasion. The best of feeling prevailed, and many kindly greetings were exchanged. There were short speeches from Governor Beaver, of Pennsylvania; from the moderators of the two Assemblies, and from the chairmen of the Committees of Arrangement, all of which were full of the spirit of fraternity and love.

The next day (Thursday) was the Centennial Day, the "great day of the feast;" and truly it was a feast-day to mind and spirit. It is hard to see how more could possibly have been packed into one day. Twenty addresses, by an equal number of the ablest ministers and elders in the two churches, were delivered during the day. Of course it was impossible for one person to hear them all. Two of the largest audience chambers in the city—the Academy of Music and Horticultural Hall—had been secured, and each of these was filled, sometimes to overflowing, morning, afternoon and night, by the listening thousands. It is sufficient to say the speakers, their addresses and the audiences were worthy of the occasion.

A few important facts were brought prominently to notice by this joint Centennial Celebration; and perhaps the first and foremost was, that hearty good will exists between the two churches. This was evidenced by the unstinted, whole-souled hospitality of the one, and the unreserved, free acceptance of this hospitality on the part of the other. However bitter the feelings of the Northern Assembly may have been a quarter of a century ago, and however offensive the

“epithets” applied at that time to their brethren of the South, those feelings do not now exist, and those epithets do not correctly voice their sentiments at the present day. We must believe this if there is any truth in the old adage: “Actions speak louder than words,” and more especially if *present* actions speak louder than *past* words. On the other hand, it is equally evident that this good will is reciprocated by the Southern Church, or they would not, because they could not, with self-respect have accepted this generous hospitality. Such munificent favors can only be honorably accepted from friends by friends. That there are some on both sides who do not share these kindly feelings, there is little room to doubt; nevertheless it is true that among the masses of the two churches there exist sincere good-will, honest esteem, admiration and affection. This is as it should be; it is simply christian.

Another matter brought prominently to the attention of every one was the re-union of the two churches. This was necessarily so, inasmuch as the subject, in one phase of it, was then pending before both Assemblies. More than half the speeches on the occasion, including that of Mr. Cleveland at Overbrook, referred in some way to the subject of re-union, and in every case with more or less favor. At the same time there seemed to be a settled conviction on both sides that the time for re-union was not yet. The questions which now deeply interest both sides are: Will the time ever come? And if so, when? Many seem to think the time will come, and that very soon. But of that day and hour probably knoweth no man. It was noticeable how earnestly some of the speakers, especially from the business walks of life, including Mr. Cleveland, urged the civil, political and business harmony of the two sections of the country as an argument for the union of the two churches. The point of the argument seems to be, that the people of the North and South, as statesmen, politicians and business men, have buried sectional feeling and strife, and have made peace; while as christians—at least as Presbyterian christians—they refuse to do so. The argument is supposed to be unanswerable, and to place the stigma of implacability upon the churches, whose spirit should be preëminently that of forgiveness and peace. This argument would not be so frequently urged were the simple truth remembered that the churches are to-day more closely united and freer from strife and bitterness than are the political and business circles of the two sections. In proof of this, reference need only be made to scenes frequently to be witnessed in both houses of Congress,

where sectional lines are often sharply and acrimoniously drawn; or to the utterances through the press of the Northern protectionist and the Southern free-trader respecting each other. As to the churches, the utmost good-will prevails, a fact proclaimed to all the world by this very Centennial Celebration. And this is all that can possibly be claimed for the classes above named, whose peaceful dispositions have been held up as an example for the churches. True, the churches have not become one; neither have the cotton or the iron manufacturers of the North and South consolidated their interests and re-united under one management; nor is such union necessary to prove their peaceful feelings toward each other.

It should never be forgotten that, as far as the churches are concerned, there must be first a vital union, an inner oneness of spirit, thought, and sentiment on those weighty matters with which the church has to deal before organic union should be urged as desirable. Indeed, the latter is but the outward expression of the former, is worse than meaningless without it, and should always follow, never precede, it. There is many a couple who live in harmony and peace as near neighbors, but who, if joined together in a close union, would know only discord and strife. Is there now that inner oneness between the two churches that would make outward union desirable and profitable? Many on both sides think there is; very many think there is not. Let us wait till all reasonable doubt on this vital question is removed. As for the present, it is almost certain that, if the two churches had been united in one at the recent Philadelphia Assembly, when, by the resolution on Decoration Day, the issues of "the war of the Rebellion" were re-opened, and when, by the action on the records of the Synod of Oregon, the church was virtually pledged to one of the political parties of the day, there would have been feelings aroused and words uttered which would not have been for the edification of the body of Christ, nor for the honor or credit of such organic union. Let us wait for the inner oneness; "for God hath called us unto peace."

But the Centennial Celebration was grand and good. One could not but be impressed with the fact that the century just closed has left to the Presbyterian Church of this country a glorious heritage, grand opportunities, and solemn responsibilities. All seemed to appreciate this, and there were manifest an earnest spirit of inquiry as to how that heritage could best be preserved, enlarged, and transmitted to future generations, and a sincere desire to discover how the large

opportunities could be best improved and the weighty responsibilities fully met. And on all these points the Centennial Celebration was helpful, shedding additional light, giving fresh courage, and inspiring new hope; for all of which we devoutly thank our common Lord and Head.

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SHALL THE BIBLE BE EXCLUDED FROM THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

IN the January number of the PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY, in the notes upon "National Reform," the author asks: "Is the State to teach any religion? If religion is to be taught in the public schools, what religion shall it be?" We might answer the first question curtly, no; neither the religion of the Turk, the Hindoo nor the Christian. To the second we answer, the religion of the Bible.

After quoting from the *Christian Statesman*, the organ of the National Association, in which quotation this sentence is used, "Perceiving the subtle and persevering attempts which are made to *prohibit* the reading of the Bible in our public schools, to overthrow our Sabbath laws, etc.," the author makes this "friendly, fraternal and courteous criticism:" "The christian religion is not a proper subject of legislation. . . . The state has nothing to do with the church of God, and if called upon to protect it in any of its material interests it can only deal with it as with the Free Masons or any other human organization in society. . . . God has appointed the church to teach religion to 'every creature,' and all that the church needs to ask the State is to protect us in our property-rights as citizens, and let us alone." Now, in all due deference to the criticism of the author, we do not gather from the paragraph quoted from the *Christian Statesman* that it is the design of the National Reform Association to require the state to "teach religion" in the schools, but to urge upon the government not to *exclude* by legislative action the Bible from the subjects taught in our public schools. We do not understand the advocates of free education to demand that the state shall teach religion, but they earnestly beg that the word of God *be not excluded therefrom*. The christian may well shudder at the thought of sending his son where he cannot carry his Bible. Were the question raised to-morrow, Shall we part with the schools or the Bible? the response from every christian heart would come in thunder tones: "Away with the schools." But we do not believe that the author means either to say,