

MINUTES

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

WITH

AN APPENDIX.

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APPENDIX.

NARRATIVE OF THE STATE OF RELIGION,

Within the bounds of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and of the churches corresponding, for May, 1830.

As the affairs of Christ's kingdom move on to a crisis, it is to be expected that the operations of the Church and the movements of her enemies will assume a more decided character. The spirit & tone of the several reports from the Churches the present year evince an unusual advancement in the progression of moral causes and also the nearness as well as the certainty of the results that are to follow. The facts contained in these reports are of a nature to gladden the hearts of Zion's friends. These facts in a condensed form are now presented to the churches. *We will declare in Zion the work of the Lord, our God.*

In a church of such wide extent of territory and embracing so great a diversity of character it is to be expected that there will be some dark spots, some undesirable things; and in an age of so much enterprise and innovation some excitements and local jealousies are to be looked for, but it is doubted whether there exists a body of christians that exhibits more unity of spirit and co-operation on all great and radical points. May union and liberty ever be inscribed on the ample folds of our banners. We are one, but our union is based upon freedom of thinking and discussion.

The first subject to which the eyes of the churches will be turned and which is vitally connected with their highest interests is the *Special work of the Spirit*. Revivals of religion are the hope of the Church; and it is now understood that by them, in a great measure, her borders are to be extended and her stakes strengthened. We rejoice and give thanks for the intelligence we have heard from every quarter. The present thus far appears to be a year of the right hand of the Most High. The footsteps of Jehovah have been seen in the Churches of the East and West, of the North and South. The following is a list of the churches that have been blessed with showers of grace, viz. Champlain, Malone, and Beekmantown in the Presbytery of Champlain; Watertown, Sacketts' Harbour, Adams, Brownville and Louisville in the Presbytery of Watertown; Hudson, Cairo, and Hunter in the Presbytery of Columbia; Augusta, Western, Trenton, Warren, Union and Rome in the Presbytery of Oneida; Windsor, Franklin, Bainbride, Harpersfield, West Coventry and Forks of the Delaware in the Presbytery of Chenango; Cicero, Liverpool, Salina, 3d Church in Pompey, Syracuse, and Otisco, in the Presbytery of Onandaga; Truxton in the Presbytery of Cortland; Owego in the Presbytery of Tioga; Ovid, in the Presbytery of Geneva; 4th Church in Albany, Schenectady and Kingsboro' in the Presbytery of Albany; the 1st and 2nd churches in Troy, Glenn's Falls, Granville, Hebron and Whitehall in the Presbytery of Troy; Ridgebury, Westown, Centreville, and Amity, in the Presbytery of Hudson; Poughkeepsie, Pittsburgh, La Grange and Pleasant Valley in the Presbytery of North River; Sweet Hollow, Brooklyn, coloured Presbyterians in the city, Union church, Canal st. Laight St. and Cedar st. churches in the Presbytery of New York; Frankfort, Wantage, and Paterson in the Presbytery of Newark; Flemington, Baskingridge, and Amwell, in the Presbytery of Newton; Bridgeton, Greenwich, Tinnicum, 5th, 10th, and 11th churches of the city of Philadelphia in the Presbytery of Philadelphia; Patterson in the Presbytery of Bedford; Harrisburgh in the Presbytery of Carlisle; George's Creek, in the Presbytery of Redstone; 3d and 4th Churches in Cincinnati and New Richmond in the Presbytery of Cincinnati; Greensburgh, Shiloh, Mumfordsville, Springfield and Lebanon in the Presbytery of Transylvania; Salem and Franklin in the Presbytery of Salem; the counties of Moore, Rob-

A LETTER

From the General Assembly to the Churches under their care, on the subject of the Monthly Concert.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, to the People under their care. "Grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Christian Brethren,—In attending, during our present sessions, to the reports from the several Presbyteries in our connexion, on the state of religion within their bounds respectively, we have been deeply grieved to find that the Monthly Concert for prayer has not been regarded in a manner corresponding with its unspeakable importance. In some Presbyteries and Congregations, indeed, it appears that the appointed season has been better observed than in others: but in almost all the observance we fear has been defective, and in many no room is left to doubt that the neglect has been great and lamentable. We, therefore, feel it to be our indispensable duty to call your serious attention to this subject, and to endeavour to speak to you upon it, with the plainness, the fidelity, and the tenderness, becoming those to whom has been committed the care of souls, and who are under an awful responsibility for the faithful discharge of their sacred trust.

As it is our earnest desire that our views may in no respect be misapprehended, we would first of all observe, that we are very far from wishing to place the day or evening, assigned for the monthly concert, on the same footing with the holy sabbath. None but God, who gave us all our time, has a right to hallow any portion of it; and he has hallowed no more than one day in seven. This you know is the doctrine of our church, and it is a doctrine which we wish not to contravene, but to maintain and teach. There certainly may be occasions when the most fervent Christian may not only find it his duty to be absent from the monthly concert, but to employ the time of its continuance in such secular business as would be utterly improper, during any of the sacred hours of the sabbath. But on the other hand, consider, brethren, that the word of God does plainly teach, that we should, as occasion requires, set apart a portion of secular time for special prayer, and for fasting too, when the aspect of God's providence plainly calls us to these duties. Recollect also, that from the nature of the case, it is not possible there should be an extended union for special prayer, without a public agreement or understanding, as to the time when individuals shall come together for the purpose. Now, we regard the monthly concert simply as a season for special prayer for the revival of religion, which the signs of the times plainly indicate to be proper; and which serious Christians throughout protestant Christendom have voluntarily agreed to observe, that their supplications may go up, as with one voice, to a prayer hearing and prayer answering God.

We are also solicitous that you should by no means suppose that we think the observance of the monthly concert, however strict, may come in place of the duty of prayer at other times, and in other forms. No, verily! On the contrary, it is with sorrow we find ourselves compelled to believe, that in the disregard of the concert, we see, not merely a single omission, but a sad and strong indication that the spirit and duty of prayer in general, are in a low and languishing state at present, among the professing people of God within our bounds. If there was as much fervent and effectual prayer as there ought to be, in the closet, in the family, in the social prayer meeting, and in the public worship of the sanctuary, we are persuaded we should have no occasion to complain that the concert was neglected. The love and holy delight of prayer, experienced and cherished in secret and social acts of warm and genuine devotion, would lead the participants in these exercises to rejoice in an opportunity to join their fellow Christians, in a more extended union for the same hallowed purpose. Alas! brethren, we do greatly fear, that the all-seeing God is witness, that the most of those who habitually, or generally, absent themselves from the monthly concert, do not address him in prayer at other times, and in other ways, with that fervour, frequency, and regularity, which Christian duty demands, and by which the spiritual health and prosperity of their own souls, would be greatly promoted. You perceive, then, that we wish the ordinary seasons and occasions of prayer should be increased, both in frequency and fervour, and not diminished on account of the monthly concert. We only desire that this latter should be added to the former. "These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

We shall now, dear brethren, state to you some of the considerations which induce us earnestly to inculcate that the monthly concert should be observed generally, and carefully, and solemnly, by every professing Christian in all our churches; and by all, indeed, who have any serious concern for the salvation of their souls.

The first consideration we shall mention is, that we have no right to expect that any, or that all the means and instrumentalities that are now in use, or that can possibly be used, for the promotion of religion, will be successful—will be attended with any *saving* benefit, unless the blessing of God be sought, and drawn down upon them, by much earnest and persevering prayer. This is a truth plainly taught in the word of God, and one that has been confirmed by the experience of the church in all ages. Thus, when God promised to his ancient covenant-people, saying—"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh;" it is added, with reference to these very promised blessings—"Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." So also, when the prophet Daniel "understood by books," that the captivity of his people in Babylon was near its close, he says, "I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." But it ought especially to be noticed, that when, by another prophet, the latter-day glory of the church is predicted—the day which we hope is now near at hand, if it has not already begun to dawn—the day when Jew and Gentile shall be gathered into one fold, and shall acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be the true Messiah, the one great "Shepherd and Bishop of souls"—the whole, it is declared, shall be preceded by special prayer, and be given in answer to it; for thus speaks the holy oracle—"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

In like manner, we find in the New Testament, that while the apostles and primitive Christians were waiting for the promised gift of the Holy Ghost, on the day of Pentecost—"They all continued in one accord, in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren:" and it was while "they were all with one accord in one place," and doubtless employed in prayer and supplication, that they received, in the most astonishing manner, the blessing for which they had been waiting. It is worthy of observation, also, that in the brief and comprehensive form of prayer, taught by our blessed Lord to his disciples, no one subject of petition is made so prominent, as that which relates to the spread and success of the gospel. And how often did the apostle Paul ask the prayers of the churches to which he addressed his epistles, for himself and the other heralds of salvation? "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you." And how emphatically does he declare, that all human agencies and instrumentalities are absolutely nothing, but as they are used and blessed of God? "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase; so then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

With all these teachings and examples of holy writ, our own observation, brethren, is in perfect accordance. Have we ever known a revival of religion, in a particular congregation or region of country, which did not commence in the revival of a spirit of prayer among God's people? He began with them; he revived them first—Perhaps indeed, their number was very small, but he impressed their spirits with a deep feeling of the constraining love of Christ, and of the infinite value of immortal souls, in danger of perishing all around them; and they cried mightily unto God for the influences of his Holy Spirit to revive his work; to show forth his glory; and to save sinners from their impending doom. Their cry was heard and answered; the influences of the Spirit of grace descended "as showers that water the earth;" converts were multiplied; and saints and angels rejoiced, over many sinners who repented and turned to God.

Consider attentively, brethren, the signs of the times. The day in which we live—blessed be God—is a day of much Christian enterprise, and of great expectation. But in our country at least, it is also a day in which the great adversary of souls, and his agents among impious men, are alarmed, awake, active, alert, banding together, forming every device, and putting forth every energy to arrest & counteract the progress of truth and righteousness. We derive encouragement from knowing that if God be for us none can be against us, so as to succeed eventually. He will ultimately and assuredly take care of his own cause, and sustain it effectually. But in the meantime, if we are not much engaged in prayer that he may *now* appear, and plead his cause *among ourselves*, we cannot tell to what lengths, in just displeasure at our remissness, he may suffer the wicked to prevail and triumph, and cover us with confusion—before he arises and scatters them as chaff before the whirlwind. We cannot tell but he will suffer his cause to

linguish and almost expire, in our own happy land, while he shall be pleading & reviving it in other countries. We verily are in jeopardy; and our refuge and hope are in God alone. Use whatever other means we may, if there is not much earnest prayer—the prayer of faith, wrestling with the angel of the covenant, the mighty God of Jacob, for his interposition, for his blessing on the other means, for his efficiency to be imparted to them—all will be vain and utterly abortive. The power to give them effect is all of God: and he seems to be waiting, to see whether we are sensible of our dependence, whether we acknowledge it, whether we deeply feel it, whether it will bring us with great and united importunity to his throne of grace, to plead with him to exert his power in our behalf; to send down his Holy Spirit; to turn his enemies into friends; to melt down all opposition, and to give his cause a glorious triumph throughout our beloved country; and ere long, throughout the world at large. Our Sabbath, and Infant, and Common schools, our Bible classes, our Bible, Missionary, Education, Tract, and Temperance societies, our Colleges and Theological Seminaries, our Catechetical instructions, and the faithful and sound preaching of evangelical truth, are all *means*—most happily adapted in their nature and design, to promote knowledge, human happiness, and the salvation of immortal souls. But none of these, nor all of them combined, will effect what their best friends desire, unless the special blessing of God attends them. In the monthly concert all these institutions and operations ought to be remembered; they ought to be borne on the hearts of God's praying people, when they beseech him to revive pure and unfiled religion. These—we repeat it—and all other benevolent institutions and operations, ought to be regarded simply as moral means; as *instruments* admirably fitted to produce reformation; but which notwithstanding never will produce it, on hearts naturally at enmity with God, unless he take them into his own hands, and put into them a resistless efficiency. To think otherwise, is to idolize human instrumentality; it is to put it in the place of God. On this he will always frown; and if we are thus self-sufficient, he will frown on us, and will show us, by mournful experience that without him we can do nothing; that all our best plans and efforts will effect nothing, till he shall please to interpose and crown them with success. It is in prayer that we recognise this truth; we acknowledge it to God, and we impress it on our own hearts. We go out of ourselves; we confess our utter impotence; and “we lift up our eyes to the hills, from whence cometh our help:” deeply sensible that “our help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” In our extended concert of prayer, if rightly conducted, there is a wide recognition of this great and essential truth; a recognition of it in regard to all the exertions, plans and efforts, that are now in use throughout protestant Christendom. We solemnly profess before the Sovereign of heaven and earth, that we feel our nothingness; that we are sensible that without his interposition and aid, we shall, by all our doings, effect nothing for the promotion of his cause; and we earnestly plead that he would not withhold that blessing which is essential to success—that he would “arise and plead his own cause.” In this view the importance of the concert is unspeakable.

But there are other considerations relative to this season for special prayer, which deserve our serious regard. One is, the encouragement which we derive from holy scripture, to expect that an extensive union in prayer will be more prevalent than that which is less general. An instance of this we have in the case of the Ninevites, who by a deep humiliation “and crying mightily unto God,” were preserved from the judgments of the Lord, which his own prophet had denounced. Another striking example is recorded in the book of Esther, from which it appears that the whole Jewish nation, when imminently threatened with utter extermination, entirely escaped the peril, after a general humiliation and looking to God for deliverance. Our Saviour himself taught the peculiar efficacy of union in prayer, when he said “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” The smallest number in which union can exist is mentioned, for the manifest purpose of establishing the principle that social prayer is, for certain purposes, more prevalent than that which is individual and solitary; and hence the strong implication, that extended union may warrant the hope of an extended blessing. It is further to be considered, that the very thought that many thousands, in different parts of the world, are engaged with ourselves at the same time, in sending up their petitions to the throne of God's mercy, is calculated greatly to encourage, excite and animate us, in our devotions. This proceeds from that social principle of our nature which God has given us, and in accordance with which our lawful desires and petitions, addressed to himself, are most likely to be answered. Again—it is a very interesting consideration that the missionaries, who are gone forth to declare the glad tidings of salvation to the destitute in our own country, and to declare them in foreign lands to Jews, Pagans, and Mahom-

etans—ask us to join with them in this concert; they ask our united and earnest prayers for their success; and they tell us they are greatly animated and encouraged in their arduous work, by knowing that they are commended to the special care and benediction of God, by pious Christians of different denominations, in a concert of fervent supplications in their behalf.—They tell us repeatedly, that they look to the monthly concert as the life-spring of their hopes: And oh! can any one who feels the smallest spark of Christian love, refuse his share of encouragement to these devoted servants of our dear and common Lord. Finally—The special object of the monthly concert is for the conversion of the whole world to God; in fulfilment of the predictions and promises of the Holy Scriptures. This is an object most dear to the heart of every real Christian. It must and will be regarded in almost all his prayers. It forms, we have remarked, the most prominent part of the Lord's prayer. Inasmuch, then, as it is a common object of prayer, and the most important for which prayer can be offered, how proper, how reasonable, how obligatory does the duty seem, that the whole "sacramental host of God's elect," should take as it were a united hold of this great object, and carry it in concert to the foot of the divine throne, and there, with one heart and tongue, most ardently plead with their common God and Father, that he would grant the petitions which their great Intercessor and Advocate, now before his mercys-seat on high, dictated to his disciples in the days of his flesh—"Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In the conclusion of our address, we "beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation." We exhort you with all earnestness, to cherish in yourselves, and to endeavour, by all lawful means, to promote in others, the spirit of prayer. It does seem to us that this, more than any thing else, is what is lacking among professing Christians at the present day—We do not pray enough, nor with engagedness enough. We say not, brethren, for we do not believe, that we give more than we ought, or as much as we ought, of our substance, time, activity, and exertion, for the promotion of the cause of God. But we do say, that the greatest want, is the want among Christians in general, of that "effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man which availeth much." O! if there was more importuning of God in the prayer of faith, we doubt not there would be more revivals of religion in our land; more success of our missionaries at home; and abundantly more to crown the labours of those, who, from our own and other countries, have gone to the wretched heathen. Prayer too would bring an influence into our Sabbath schools and Bible classes, such as we have never yet seen; and give an efficiency to all our plans and enterprises of benevolence and piety, that would fill us with surprise. Humble, earnest, persevering prayer, among all who name the name of Christ, would likewise, we are persuaded, soon be followed by the Spirit of the Lord lifting up a standard against that array of bold and blasphemous infidelity, which now threatens more injury to our beloved country, than if—with God our friend—all the nations of the earth were leagued against us.

We exhort you, therefore, brethren, that in your closets, and families, and praying associations, and the sanctuary of God, and the monthly concert, there be an earnest cry and an earnest effort, for the revival of the spirit of prayer. In regard to the concert, let those professors of religion who have hitherto neglected it, be entreated by a regard to the consistency of their Christian profession; by a consideration of the example which they are bound to set before others; as they would encourage and not grieve the hearts of their fellow Christians; as they would promote their own growth in grace, and spiritual peace and comfort; as they love the Redeemer that died for them; as they love their country, exposed, on account of abounding iniquity, to the sore judgments of heaven; and as they wish to share in the happiness and the reward of those who promote the kingdom of God and his declarative glory in the world—in view of all these motives, let them be entreated to take part with their brethren, in the sacred duty of praying for the speedy accomplishment of the promise, that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

Signed in behalf, and by order of the General Assembly.

EZRA FISK, *Moderator.*

Philadelphia, May 31, 1830.

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

Of the Directors of the Theological Seminary at Princeton, N. J.

The Board of Directors of the Theological Seminary at Princeton present to the General Assembly the following report.

At the date of the last report the number of students in the Seminary was one hundred and seven.