

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.

pus has been able to bring him, alive or dead, body or bone, into court. The scientific eye now looks to Africa, and to some other remote and geologically unexplored regions, where the missing link or his remains may lurk. Why did he demise, and yet the gorilla survive?

And the papyrus, or cylinder, or cuneiform inscription on a tablet is yet to seek which shall tell us how the babe Adam was suckled from the *distenta ubera* of his primate dam, and was dandled in her paws; how he honored his dam, and, if he ever met the gentleman, his sire too, so that his days were long in the land; how he grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and the anthropoids; how he acquired the habit of talking to himself from lack of human fellowship, and how, after long tutelage in a holy course of life, he sinned and fell, and thus sin entered into the world, and all our mortal woes! Can the church of God accept this hypothesis? Never. L. G. BARBOUR.

THE NORTHERN GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

THE opening of the Centennial Assembly at Philadelphia, on the 17th of May, 1888, was an imposing ceremony. The vast body formed at Horticultural Hall and marched in procession to the First Church. The able sermon of the retiring moderator was addressed to a great audience, composed of the commissioners and an overflowing multitude.

On re-assembling in the afternoon there arose an interesting contest for moderator. Many felt that the position should be given to Dr. McCosh as the crowning honor to one of the most illustrious of Presbyterians. But the choice fell on Dr. Charles L. Thompson, of Kansas City, who vindicated its wisdom by his conduct of the office.

Five hundred and twenty-two members were enrolled. This large number had two results: greater impulse was added by the weight and enthusiasm of the multitude; but, on the other hand, the value of the body as a deliberative assembly was injuriously affected. It became evident that the number must be reduced, or else that all business must be first considered in committees.

The general work of the church was found to be in a highly prosperous state. The Boards of Missions, (Home and Foreign), of Education, of Aid to Colleges, of Publication and others have made most encouraging progress. The Sabbath-school Missionary department of the Board of Publication showed marked development. In addition to its regular missionaries, more than sixty students from the Theo-

logical Seminaries have been sent out for four months' labor in the West and Northwest. The effort to raise the Million-Dollar Fund for Ministerial Relief, though not entirely successful as yet, will probably be completed in the future.

The Standing Committee on Temperance reported a resolution excluding from church membership those who manufacture or sell liquor; and with the solitary opposition of Dr. Howard Crosby, although others endeavored in vain to obtain the floor in his support, was tumultuously passed. Thus a term of communion was sought to be imposed for which there is no warrant in Scripture or the standards.

The Freedmen's Board occupied the attention of the Assembly, specially with reference to the question whether it shall remain separate or be incorporated with the Board of Home Missions. The matter lies over in the hands of a special committee.

The Committee on Bills and Overtures reported in favor of the formation of a Negro Presbytery in Virginia and its attachment to the colored Synod of Atlantic. This report was adopted without dissent by the Assembly.

Dr. John R. Paxton, in view of all the trouble we have had and are having about these children of Africa, anathematized the day they were brought from their native land to our shores. This remark was open to three interpretations—a condemnation of the slave trade, a lamentation over the insoluble problems thereby forced on America, or an objugation of the negro. The audience, or a portion of it, put the last construction on his words, whereupon there ensued something quite astounding and incredible: a strange sound filled the air; a vibrating, penetrating, infuriating sibilation; a commissioner, formerly a soldier in the Federal army, and now the pastor of one of the great churches of New York city, was publicly and loudly *hissed* in the hall of the General Assembly. The moderator called to order, the Assembly cried shame; it was stated that the hissing did not proceed from members of the Assembly, but the contrary was also asserted. It was evident that the great body of the Assembly condemned this unreasoning method of debate; and when Dr. Paxton afterwards explained his remark as directed against the slave trade, his assailants were still further disgraced; and thus the incident ended.

The report of the Committee of Conference with the Southern Church was, after reference to a special committee, unanimously

adopted. The General Assembly declared in favor of coöperation with the other branch in all practicable methods. It added, however, that organic union is requisite in order to perfect coöperation. The desire of the great body of the Northern Church is toward organic union, and principally for the reason that the efficiency of the united churches will be increased thereby.

The energies of the Northern Church are directed toward active labors in extending the area and power of its influence. It is difficult to estimate fully the wide scope of these efforts. Too great praise cannot be accorded to the zeal and intelligence with which its great enterprises are conducted. This church believes that union with the Southern Church would secure an immense development of Presbyterianism.

The resolution on Decoration Day was an untoward incident, yet it does not possess the significance attached to it by lookers-on at a distance. It was voted down by the Assembly, and then passed in a modified form, in the hurry of the last day. As adopted, it was intended to be simply an expression of reverence for the dead and of sympathy with their families. Whatever may be its apparent political complexion, there was no purpose to make a political deliverance. The debate showed this. It is incredible that, after inviting the Southern Church to organic union, the Assembly intended to say anything which would prove to be an obstacle in the way of it. The Assembly was surprised by the sudden introduction of the resolution; all the speakers regretted it; in the confusion that followed, and in the haste of the last moments, it was difficult to do the wisest thing. It is safe to say that nothing of the kind will be permitted in the future to obtrude itself upon the Assembly. I have not met with any minister or member who does not regret that the resolution was offered, or who considers it, as adopted, to possess political significance, or who attaches any importance to it.

Knowing the view of this incident taken by some in the South, and having been present in the Assembly at the time, and having talked with many leading men since, I am bound to present the matter as it appears to the actors in it. Intention gives complexion to action; and I feel sure that there was no intention, either to insult the Southern people or to make a political deliverance.

As individuals, most of the members doubtless approved the war, but as an ecclesiastical body, nothing was further from its purpose than to rekindle its dying embers in this centennial year.

T. A. HOYT.