

MINUTES
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FROM ITS ORGANIZATION
A. D. 1789 TO A. D. 1820 INCLUSIVE.

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E.V.

advise to annul such marriages, or pronounce them in such a degree unlawful as that the parties, if otherwise worthy, should be debarred from the privileges of the Church. But as a great diversity of opinion appears to exist on such questions, in different parts of the Church, so that no absolute rule can be enjoined with regard to them, that shall be universally binding and consistent with the peace of the Church; and as the cases in question are esteemed to be doubtful, the Assembly is constrained to leave it to the discretion of the inferior judicatories under their care, to act according to their own best light, and the circumstances in which they find themselves placed."

The committee appointed to draw up a letter to be addressed to the churches under the care of the Assembly on the subject of a Theological School, brought in the following letter, which being read and amended, was adopted, and is as follows, viz :

"The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, to the churches under their care :

Dear Brethren :—Among the various objects which have engaged our attention in the course of our present sessions, one of the most important is the plan of a Theological Seminary, proposed to be established in some convenient spot within the bounds of our Church. This plan, so far as it has been matured, accompanies the present address, and solicits your serious consideration.

We trust, dear brethren, it is not necessary to employ much argument to convince you that the time has arrived in which some new and vigorous exertions are indispensable for increasing the number, and raising the qualifications, of candidates for the gospel ministry in our Church; when you are apprized that we have near four hundred vacant congregations within our bounds; that the frontier settlements, as well as many large and important districts in the interior of our country, are every year calling upon us for missionary labours which we are not able to supply; and that there is no prospect that any means of relief yet devised will be sufficient to preserve many parts of the church from a most distressing famine of the word of life, we trust you will perceive the absolute necessity of using our utmost exertions for sending forth more labourers into so great a harvest.

We feel persuaded that if the plan which we have adopted can be carried into vigorous execution, it will tend, under the divine blessing, to increase the number of candidates for the holy ministry. If we are enabled, by the possession of suitable funds, not only to afford a more complete and ample course of instruction in theology than has been heretofore, in ordinary cases, attainable, but also to afford this instruction *gratuitously* to those who are themselves destitute of adequate pecuniary resources, we cherish the hope that these facilities will be the means of drawing into public view many ingenuous and pious youth, who are at present either discouraged from making the attempt to gain an education for the ministry, or not properly awakened to the loud and important demands of the Church.

But farther: such a seminary as that which is now proposed is not less calculated to *improve the education* than to increase the number of candidates for the sacred office. Without some provision of this kind, it is in most cases, utterly impossible to bring forward candidates for the ministry, with that furniture and those qualifications for their work which the state of society now renders, in a great measure, indispensable to their respectability and usefulness. It is to be hoped that we shall never cease to consider vital and experimental religion as the first and most indispensable qualification in every candidate for the holy ministry. All attainments without this, would unquestionably be not only inadequate but pernicious. Yet it must also be admitted, that piety alone cannot qualify a man to be a teacher of the gospel,

especially in circumstances where the literary and scientific attainments of many avowed infidels, and the general improvement of almost all descriptions of people, will render it impossible for the religious teacher to maintain weight of character, and permanent influence, if his knowledge be scanty, and his literature circumscribed. The minister himself, in such a situation, will feel, and be disconcerted by a sense of his inferiority, and will neither speak with confidence in himself, nor in such a manner as to beget and preserve confidence in the minds of others.

Influenced by these considerations, it has been the universal custom of the Protestant churches in Europe, and of none more than of that church from which we derive our origin, to encourage a learned and pious ministry, and to institute schools for the purpose. These schools, particularly in Scotland and Holland, have been cherished with the greatest care ever since the time of the glorious Reformation, and have been attended with the happiest consequences; nor would it be difficult to prove that they have had a most important efficacy in preserving the influence of evangelical truth in those countries. Churches in this country derived from those of Scotland and Holland, and still more recently, our Congregational brethren in Massachusetts, have undertaken similar institutions, and have already begun to reap fruits of the most promising kind. Unless we imitate their laudable example, the consequences will probably be, that in a few years, while they rise and flourish, we shall decline, and fall into a state of discouraging weakness and inferiority.

Impressed with these convictions, and placed in these solemn circumstances, the Assembly have resolved, in the name, and as they trust, with an humble reliance on the aid of the great King of Zion, to go forward and attempt the execution of the plan, which will be herewith submitted to your consideration. They have preferred the establishment of a single school, to the erection of a great number, because after comparing the reports from the several Presbyteries, and the sentiments of commissioners to the Assembly from the various parts of the Church, there appeared every reason to believe that the former plan would be most acceptable and most generally approved; and also because they are of opinion, that this plan, by concentrating the strength and resources of the whole Church, will furnish a more complete system of education, and tend more than any other to promote the purity, peace, harmony, and vigour of the Presbyterian body in the United States.

And now, dear brethren, it depends, under God, on your patronage and liberality, whether the plan proposed shall be carried into execution; and if executed at all, whether with languor and comparative inutility, or with vigour and effect. To support several professors; to provide an adequate library; and to furnish the means of gratuitous instruction and boarding to a large number of poor and pious youth, will require large funds. For obtaining these, we have no human dependence but your liberality. And accordingly to solicit contributions in different portions of the Church, we have appointed agents who are directed to report the result of their solicitations to the next General Assembly.

We call upon you, Christian brethren, as the professed disciples of Christ, to consider the important crisis, and the momentous objects which are now brought to your view. You acknowledge that you are not your own, but that you are bought with a price, and are bound to glorify God in your bodies and spirits, which are his. If it be so, *your silver and your gold are the Lord's*; and you are under obligations to employ them in such a manner, as will most effectually promote the glory of him, by whose bounty they were given you. With this great principle in view, consider the pressing calls of large and flourishing churches, who solicit in vain for ministers to break to them

the bread of life. Consider the loud and affecting cries of many destitute settlements, which know nothing of those precious privileges with which you are surrounded. Consider the honour of the Church, with which you are connected; the interests of religion, for which you profess to feel; the infinite value of immortal souls, who are perishing for lack of knowledge; the authority of that God who commands you to compassionate them; and the guilt which you will contract if the health of the church should languish, or souls perish, by your negligence or parsimony. Consider these things, and then say whether you can consent to withhold a portion of your substance when called upon to aid in one of the most important concerns ever presented to your consideration.

Brethren, we leave this subject for your solemn and prayerful deliberation. Praying that He who has the hearts of all flesh in his hands, may dispose you to do that which is well pleasing in his sight, and honourable to your Christian profession; and that grace, mercy, and peace, may be multiplied unto you from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, we are, in the bonds of the gospel, your friends and brethren.

Signed by order of the Assembly.

JOHN B. ROMEYN, *Moderator.*"

The Stated Clerk was directed to have printed five hundred copies of the plan for a Theological School, and of the letter on the subject, and a number of subscription papers.

Adjourned till 6 o'clock, to-morrow morning.

Concluded with prayer.

May 31st, 6 o'clock, A. M.

The Assembly met and was constituted by prayer.

The minutes of last session were read.

The Presbytery of Hartford stated to the Assembly, that in their opinion it would be advantageous to the cause of religion, to ordain Mr. Robert Sample, *sine titulo*, and requested leave thus to ordain him; whereupon,

Resolved, That said Presbytery be permitted to ordain Mr. Sample, provided they judge it expedient.

Resolved, That fifty copies of the printed extracts of the minutes of this Assembly be sent by the delegates from the Assembly to the Convention of Vermont, and the Association of New Hampshire, to each twenty-five copies.

The Assembly being informed that a mistake had been made, in the report of the Committee of Missions, relative to the balance due to the Rev. Lemuel Smith, it was

Resolved, That the Trustees of the General Assembly should issue a warrant in his favour for ten dollars.

Resolved, That the Trustees of the Assembly issue a warrant for the payment of the Permanent Clerk for his services, agreeably to the rate fixed by the Assembly of 1806, for the stationery furnished by him for the use of the General Assembly, and for a box procured to hold their papers.

Resolved, That the Trustees issue a warrant for the payment of twenty-five dollars and fifty cents, to Joseph Jacobs, for twelve and a half days' service rendered the Assembly during the present sessions, and for articles furnished by him for their use.

The roll being called agreeably to a standing rule, to ascertain if any members had left the Assembly without leave, it was determined that none be reported this year to their Presbyteries, as delinquents in this case.

Resolved, That this Assembly be dissolved, and that the next General Assembly be required to meet in the Second Presbyterian Church in the