

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

NO. 8. — APRIL, 1889.

I. WOMAN IN THE CHURCH.

As straws show the direction of the wind, so recent events in church and state indicate the movement of a popular current, more or less clearly defined, towards the removal of what are called woman's disabilities, and her enfranchisement in what are claimed to be her civil and ecclesiastical rights. There is not room in an article like this for a discussion of the genesis of this movement, or for a review, however cursory, of the debates and deliverances of various public assemblies, social, political and ecclesiastical, in which the strength of the movement has recently made itself felt. There is, we think, no just ground for fear that its current will gain momentum enough to sweep away the conservative barriers within which woman's agency is rightly confined. We have no sympathy with the fears expressed by a distinguished speaker in one of the recent Northfield conferences, when he says, "We behold woman to-day in a condition in which she is absolutely a menace to human society; grown restless and discontented; clamoring for rights when Christianity has brought her all that she has; at times divorced from the church, listening to the siren's song of infidelity, threatening to depart from the church that would withhold from her any privileges or rights she would claim; in the very capital of our nation threatening to join hand with anarchists to secure under another government what she may not secure here." It would be a gross injustice to the noble women of our land to hold them responsible for the incendiary utterances of a few restless spirits amongst them, or to suppose that they endorse the revolutionary sentiments of the speaker to whom Bishop

have metal behind it—the dollar, so the ballot must have metal behind it—the bullet.”

But female suffrage is something more than useless. It is the vilest license, in that it is a violation of nature's laws. God never intended woman to suffer suffrage. Not one word would we say against those women, true and good, for the noble work they have done against the liquor curse. Rather would we praise, but at the same time lift a warning voice against that devilish ingenuity that has coupled female suffrage to the cause of temperance.

Thus may be traced the workings of a spirit which, produced by our national life, is the nation's foe. From what has been said one may get an inadequate conception of how far license has permeated our thought and practice. Surely it has gone so far that a warning voice should be heeded. If it be asked, What is the remedy? who is the patriot that shall chop off the head of this demon, dammed by greed and sired by ignorance? it may be replied, that the question contains its own answer. It goes without the saying that the guardians of liberty are the church and the school. It is only the love of the gospel that will annihilate greed, the mother of license, and it is only a liberal education that will annihilate ignorance, the father of license. Hence he is the true patriot who is the friend of the church and the friend of the school.

America's pride is her freedom. Woe! if it should become her shame. To-day her liberty is less her license. We must not forget that preservation is as essential as creation. Freedom best is FREEDOM KEPT.

Alexandria, Va.

JAMES I. VANCE.

MEMBERSHIP IN PRO-RE-NATA MEETINGS.

A QUESTION has been raised in one of our church courts as to the right of membership in *pro-re-nata* meetings of Presbytery, especially in those that may be held between the meeting of Synod and the following stated meeting of Presbytery. There were three opinions—first, that the right belonged to the member of the last stated meeting; second, that it belonged to the Synodical representative; third, that there should be a new election. And it is possible that a similar variety of opinions exists in other parts of our church. We here consider the nature of the meeting, and who may join in the call; the *status* of elders in Synod, and the logical consequences.

The Form of Government, Chap. V., Sec. IV., Par. 8, defines as follows the manner in which such a meeting shall be called:

“The Presbytery shall meet on its own adjournment; and when any emergency shall require a meeting sooner than the time to which it stands adjourned, the Moderator, or in case of his death, absence, or inability to act, the stated clerk shall, with the concurrence or at the request of two ministers and two elders, the elders being of different congregations, call a special meeting. For this purpose he shall send a circular letter, specifying the particular business of the intended meeting, to every minister belonging to Presbytery, and to the Session of every vacant congregation, in due time, previous to the meeting, which shall not be less than ten days. And nothing shall be transacted at said special meeting besides the particular business for which the judicatory has been thus convened.”

In one important particular this account is defective, since it does not indicate what particular elders may join in the call. It leaves it an open question, and thus leaves room for a doubt whether the call convenes the stated meeting or provides for a new judicature. And, as a matter of fact, opinion varies on this point, probably as a result.

Our own Assembly, Minutes 1872, says:

“When an elder is appointed to attend a stated meeting of Presbytery, he may, without any new appointment, meet and act with the Presbytery until its next stated meeting, unless the Session shall appoint some other member of the bench of elders to act in his place.”

This language seems to imply that ordinarily it is proper to hold a special election for a representative of Session to sit in a *pro-re-nata* meeting. It implies that in such a meeting the elder who represented the Session at the stated meeting sits by concession or courtesy, but not by absolute right. It ignores the idea that there is any vital relation between the *pro-re-natu* and the stated meeting. Yet there must be some such relation; otherwise, why should it devolve on the moderator of the stated meeting to call the *pro-re-natu* meeting and preside over it?

The confusion of ideas on this point may arise from the fact that the compilers of the Digests, both Baird and Moore, fail to give the whole scope of the original enactment, failing to state the circumstances which produced it.

It occurred in this way. The following query was presented to the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1760:

“How many ministers are necessary to request the moderator of the commission of Synod or of any of our Presbyteries to oblige the moderator to call any of these judicatories to do occasional business?”

Synod replied :

“The Synod judge that meetings of judicatures *pro-re-nata* can only be necessary, on account of important occurrences unknown at their last meeting, and which cannot be safely deferred till their stated meeting, such as scandal raised on a minister’s character, tending to destroy his usefulness, and to bring a reproach on religion; or feuds in a congregation, threatening its dissolution; or some dangerous error or heresy broached; but not for matters judicially deferred by the judicature, except some unforeseen circumstance occurs, which makes it appear that some principal thing on which the judgment depends may then be had, and cannot be obtained if it is deferred till their stated meeting; nor for any matters that ordinarily come in at their stated meetings. And when such occasional meetings appear necessary to the moderator himself, it is proper to call the judicature together, or upon the application of any two members judging it necessary, provided always that reasonable notice be given to all the members of the occasion, time and place of the meeting, and that it be appointed at such a season as may render the attendance of the members practicable.”

This answer informs us, that in both meetings the moderator and members were the same. It asserts the same principle for the commission of Synod and the Presbyteries, namely, that they were not dissolved till their successor was regularly appointed. They were counted as being in session until the next stated meeting. And the *pro-re-nata* meeting was nothing more than the regular Presbytery performing *pro-re-nata* business. It was simply a re-assembling of a still existing judicature. Consequently, no elder holds his seat in the the *pro-re-nata* meeting by sufferance or by courtesy, but as a right which is his because he is a member of the stated meeting; and furthermore, no elder has a right to sign a call to a *pro-re-nata* meeting, who is not a member of the previous stated meeting.

MEETINGS CALLED BY SYNOD.

Synod also has the power to convene Presbytery in a *pro-re-nata* meeting. (Minutes, 1848, p. 60.)

“*Resolved*, 1, That Synod has power to order a Presbytery to meet and transact such business as in the judgment of Synod is intimately connected with the good order and well-being of the church.

“*Resolved*, 2, That as such meetings are of the nature of *pro-re-nata* meetings, the rules that are laid down in our Book for the regulation of such called meetings ought to regulate and govern in all cases these meetings ordered by Synod, except when ordered to meet during the sessions of Synod on business immediately connected with the proceedings of that body. In such cases Presbytery may be required to meet at once by order of Synod.”

At called meetings of this nature representatives of the churches, who are members of Synod, without dispute, take their places as

regular members of their respective Presbyteries, although they may not have been members of the previous stated meeting. Frequently they were not. Cases occur on the floor of Synod, where not a single elder of a given Presbytery was a member of the previous stated meeting of that body. But subsequent to the stated meeting, they were chosen to represent their Sessions in Synod. In the nature of the case, they were clothed with all the rights and privileges of a member of Synod; one of which is the privilege of sitting as a member of Presbytery in the *pro-re-nata* meetings held by order of Synod.

Our legislation would direct Synod to order such meetings in vain, if it did not at the same time extend its authorization, to respond, both to Presbyteries and Sessions. The law cannot direct Synod to call such meetings at will, except by guaranteeing the presence of those constituent elements of Presbytery which the sessions must provide. It must, therefore, be construed as defining the *status* of elders in Synod as corresponding to the requirements of the law, that is to say, that they, by their position as members of Synod, are qualified to sit with their Presbyteries in the meetings specified.

In that case, what becomes of the natural right to sit in the *pro-re-nata* meeting, of the elder who represented the same Session in the stated meeting? It cannot be said that the member of Synod sits as an alternate, for he sits in a higher court. Neither can it be said that he receives from Synod the right to sit in Presbytery, because Synod has no power to constitute membership in a lower court. This is a fixed principle of our law.

The church Session alone is competent to qualify an elder to be a member of Presbytery; and it can only do so by electing him a member. His membership is vacated by the expiration of his term or by a new election. And the election of an elder qualified to sit in Presbytery at Synod necessarily vacates the membership of his predecessor, since no Session is entitled to more than one representative in Presbytery. The appointment to Synod, which carries with it the right and duty of sitting in Presbytery, constitutes an elder the latest representative of his Session. The conclusion seems unavoidable, that unless the right of his predecessor be restored by a new election, it will become his duty to represent his Session in subsequent meetings of his Presbytery which may occur between that meeting of Synod and the next stated meeting of his Presbytery.

It is in accordance with this line of argument, whether intended or not, that the Assembly, in 1888, (Minutes, p. 425,) defines the elder's

term of service in Presbytery as extending from one stated meeting to another, “*unless* the Session otherwise direct.” This is an explicit admission that Session has the right to *otherwise* direct and supersede the first appointment. And most certainly it does supersede, when, instead of sending the first elder, it sends another to Synod, with the included right to sit in Presbytery in the meetings convened by Synod. Thence till the next stated meeting he must continue to hold his seat in Presbytery, “*unless* Session otherwise directs.”

New Orleans, La.

HENRY M. SMITH.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS FASTING ?

TOUCHING upon the duty of Presbyterians in regard to fasting, the Directory of Worship, Chap. XIV., Par. 4, makes this observation: “If at any time the civil power should think it proper to appoint a fast or thanksgiving, it is the duty of the ministers and people of our communion, as we live under a Christian government, to pay all due respect to the same.”

The law of non-interference between church and state we both recognize and heartily endorse. The church, being spiritual in her character and aims, has no right to guide the policy of the state or to “compel men to accept her doctrine and yield to her dominion.” The state, on the other hand, while bound to protect the church in all its rights of worship, and from all tyranny and illegal forms of usurpation, is, by the secularity of its nature, estopped from any further interference; and hence all effort in this direction should be resisted even unto death. Bearing this plain and broad distinction in mind, we pass on to the question, What should be the attitude of the church towards fasting? At present it is one of sublime indifference.

In Presbyterian circles, the time-honored custom of fasting has well-nigh fallen into utter disuse. Indeed, many seem to think that this duty pertained entirely to the old dispensation, and, with that, ceased to be either binding or necessary. That this is not the case we hope to show, and thus, at the outset, boldly assert that the present attitude of the church is to be condemned, and that more zeal and practical activity are greatly to be desired. This assumption is based upon three facts: