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A REVIEW OF THE NEW ORLEANS ASSEMBLY, 1919.

BY REV. WALTER L. LINGLE, D. D., *Editor.*

It was my privilege to be present at the opening of the Assembly and to attend all of its sessions except those held on the last day. Since the Assembly dissolved I have read with care the reports given of the work of the Assembly in all of our Church papers. It is not my purpose in this article to set down in chronological order all that the Assembly did. The reader is referred to the Church papers and the minutes of the Assembly for that. I wish the rather to pass under review the most important acts of the Assembly and to make such comments as may seem pertinent. I shall try to speak with fairness and yet with the utmost frankness. It is probably too much to hope that all my readers will agree with all that I may say, as the Assembly itself was much divided on a number of the most important questions.

## FEDERAL UNION.

The question that aroused largest interest in the Assembly was that of Federal Union with other Presbyterian Churches. That question was uppermost in the minds of many commissioners when they voted for moderator on Thursday afternoon, May 15th, and continued to be so until it was voted on about 4 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, May 21st. However, this was not the deciding factor in the election of the moderator. The man who nominated Dr. Fraser for moderator

THE ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIRST GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
IN THE U. S. A.

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The One Hundred and Thirty-first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. opened in the Odeon Theater, St. Louis, Mo., on Thursday, May 15, 1919, and closed on Friday, May 23. The opening sermon was preached by the retiring Moderator, Rev. J. Frank Smith, D. D., of Dallas, Tex., on the text, "Ye must be born anew," his theme being "Regeneration in Order to Reconstruction," and during an hour and ten minutes he maintained that we must have a new birth in business, in mind and in brotherhood. The sermon abounded in striking rhetoric and forceful illustrations and made a deep impression on the large audience. Following the sermon the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was administered, about forty elders distributing the bread and cup with dispatch and impressive reverence.

THE ELECTION OF AN ELDER MODERATOR.

The election of a Moderator on Thursday afternoon was attended with more than usual interest. For the first time in our history it was possible, according to the express provision of the revised Form of Government, to have an elder as Moderator, in which respect we have followed the example of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and an elder and four ministers were put in nomination in ten speeches that mingled logic and wisdom and wit so as to entertain the Assembly without weariness for an hour and a half. John Willis Baer was the elder nominated, and while he did not have a walkover, and a change of sixty-five votes would have elected

Rev. Dr. S. Hall Young, the hero pioneer missionary of Alaska, his only rival after the other ministerial candidates had withdrawn, yet he was easily lifted into the Moderator's chair by the tidal wave that swept over the Assembly in favor of an elder as an occupant of this office. Dr. Baer, who was formerly President of Occidental College and is now a banker in Los Angeles, is a master of Assemblies, and by his fine personality, strong, clear voice and prompt dispatch of business made a splendid Moderator, and he has left an example that will be a high ideal for coming occupants of this chair, whether lay or ministerial, to attain.

#### THE BOARDS OF THE CHURCH.

The business of the General Assembly falls into two main parts, the reports of the eight Boards of the Church, and such general matters as belong to the routine of the Assembly or arise as special issues. The eight Boards are Home Missions, Foreign Missions, Publication and Sabbath School Work, Church Erection, Relief and Sustentation, Freedmen, Temperance, and the General Board of Education, this last Board coming before the Assembly for the first time this year as a consolidation of the former Board of Education and the former College Board. The former Board of Education looked after the care of students for the ministry, and this is now a department, and the care of colleges is another department, in the new General Board of Education.

All of these Boards reported a successful year, nearly all of them reporting the largest incomes in their history, and most of them closed the year with a surplus. The Home Board, which for several years has been burdened and discouraged with deficits, reported the receipt of \$984,527 and closed the year with a surplus of \$47,775. In addition to this, the Woman's Board of Home Missions reported receipts of \$515,488, with a surplus of \$1,398. Publication and Sabbath School Work received for its missionary work \$286,131, and its publication department did a business of over \$1,000,000. Church Erection received \$547,886 and closed with a surplus of \$116,-

393, and has invested funds of \$4,862,445. Relief and Sustentation in its Relief Department received \$477,963 and extended help to 680 ministers, 900 widows, and 135 orphans and lay missionaries. The Sustentation Department is now paying 134 pensions and will soon pay the full amount of such pensions, which is \$500 a year. The total assets of the Board are now \$7,107,669, and it is intended to increase this as soon as possible to the goal that has been set of \$10,000,000. The Board of Freedmen had receipts of \$287,454 and closed with a surplus of \$44,547. The Assembly recommended that the name of this Board be changed so as to eliminate the word Freedmen, which no longer properly describes the condition of the colored race. The Board of Temperance received \$83,111 and had a surplus of \$23,044. Now that national prohibition has been achieved, the scope of this Board has been broadened and its name will be changed to Temperance and Social Welfare. The General Board of Education reported for only a part of the year, as it went into operation last November, but it has resources of over \$2,000,000, and will launch a movement to secure \$35,000,000 in the next five years for the strengthening of Presbyterian institutions.

The one Board that seemed to be an exception to this general prosperity was that of Foreign Missions, which expended over \$3,000,000 and closed the year with a debt of \$600,000. This unprecedented deficit, however, which in ordinary times would excite alarm and criticism, was almost wholly due to the extraordinary emergencies and demands thrown upon the Board by the great war, about one-half of it being caused by the terrible conditions in Syria alone, where the missionaries expended several hundred thousand dollars in relief and saved many thousands of lives. The Board, instead of being depressed by, was rightly proud of this debt, and it is the measure and proof of its boldness and heroism in meeting great emergencies in the name of humanity and of Christ. The debt will easily be taken care of in the budget for the present year. In view of the many demands made upon the people during the year by

the war, the encouraging reports of the Boards was the cause of much rejoicing and gratitude.

### THE NEW ERA MOVEMENT.

The New Era Movement was launched by the Assembly of 1918, but the aims and methods of the project at that time were more or less indefinite and vaguely understood, and this caused the movement to move slowly for several months. The influenza epidemic occasioned a delay of many weeks at the time when the movement was just getting under way; and as a result of all this there was during the fall and winter considerable doubt as to the success of the movement. However, under the indefatigable labor and contagious enthusiasm of its General Secretary, Rev. Dr. William Hiram Foulkes, who resigned the secretaryship of the Board of Relief and Sustentation to undertake the leadership of the movement, it gained headway during the latter part of the year. Meetings were held in the leading cities as regional centers, at which prominent secretaries and pastors and laymen delivered inspirational addresses and the plans for the canvass were explained, this canvass being made in the week beginning March 23. The movement had in view a quickening and marshalling of all the activities, financial and spiritual, of the Church, and was to culminate in a drive for the united budget of all the benevolences, totaling \$13,000,000, and of local church support, totaling \$25,000,000. The committee was able to report that of these sums \$11,400,000 had been pledged for benevolences and the full \$25,000,000 for local support. The average total contributions to the benevolent Boards for the last three years was only a little over \$4,000,000 from living givers, and the pledges for this year for the same causes amount to over \$10,000,000, so that the New Era Movement has increased contributions from living givers to the Boards about 250 per cent. The overhead expense of the movement was estimated at one and one-half per cent., which is a low percentage compared with the expense of similar campaigns in the business world. This

gratifying result was received with great satisfaction by the Assembly, and under a stirring address by Rev. Dr. Foulkes it was deeply moved with joy and thanksgiving.

The committee announced a five-fold program for the present year, as follows: 1. The adoption of a business-like and adequate financial policy and methods by all individual congregations and by Boards and agencies of the General Assembly. 2. The second definite projection of the New Era Movement for the year 1919-1920 is the outline of a practical constructive program of individual church activity, covering the entire year, preserving initiative, and, at the same time, promoting the unity in action of the whole Church. 3. The assignment of definite service to the large number of laymen who have already been enlisted in the activities of the Church. 4. A gradual modification of the policies and program of the Church, local and national, in order more effectively to meet the needs of the New Era and to solve the peculiar problems of each community, Presbytery, Synod, as well as of every distinctive type of work. 5. A definite program for the promotion of Christian unity and for releasing the power that comes through co-operative labor, looking forward also to the elimination of the evils of competitive denominationalism.

The Assembly approved "the statement of the objectives for the ensuing five years and the five-fold program for the activities of the coming year, and authorized the committee to use all its resources to carry out this program and to attain a full year's share of the objectives."

#### THE INTER-CHURCH WORLD MOVEMENT.

The New Era Movement was already being overshadowed during the latter part of the year by the new and greater "movement" that was looming on the horizon and known as The Inter-Church World Movement. It was understood that this movement originated in a suggestion coming from the Foreign Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. A preliminary organization had been formed

in New York and various preparatory meetings had been held when the matter came up to our Assembly. There had arisen "no small stir about that way" among the commissioners to the Assembly, and it was known that the new movement would meet with both strong support and strong opposition. The matter was first taken up by the "Official Conference," which is a joint conference of representatives of the Boards and representatives of the Executive Commission, and during four nights it was debated pro and con from every angle. The outcome of this discussion was the adoption of a paper favoring the approval of the movement subject to certain conditions which were afterward incorporated in the action of the Assembly. This paper, however, was not binding on the Executive Commission, which afterward submitted it to the Assembly, together with reasons why the Assembly should not approve the movement at present, but permit the Executive Commission to hold it under consideration for another year and report to the Assembly of 1920.

This is the shape in which the matter came before the Assembly. The reasons given for delay were that "the versions which the Executive Commission received of the plans proposed were radically different," that "we are not asked by other churches to co-operate with them or their agencies," that "we are informed that the present organization has already incurred a debt, in an amount of which we have no information," and that "other reasons for requesting additional time suggested themselves to the commission." The commission recommended "that the General Assembly record its approval of the central principle of a proper co-operative program among the evangelical churches," and this action was taken without debate.

The question then came before the Assembly on a motion to refer the matter to the Executive Commission with power to act subject to certain conditions, to which was opposed a substitute to defer action until 1920. The arguments for delay were along the line that the movement is indefinite and dangerous, that it is in the hands of some unacceptable leaders, that it is already overloaded with overhead expenses, and that it is an

other cumbersome and costly piece of machinery. The arguments for committing it to the commission with power to act contended that it is a movement for co-operation in practical work in keeping with the spirit of the day when the nations are getting together, that it is in the interest of economy and efficiency, and that delay for a year is practically to put the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. out of the procession. The Assembly seemed to be swayed from the one to the other side of the question as the debate proceeded, but finally action in favor of committing the movement to the Executive Commission with power to act was taken in the adoption of the following resolution, which seemed to give satisfaction to all parties in the Assembly:

*“Resolved, That the Assembly refer the matter of the Inter-Church World Movement to the Executive Commission with power to act within the limits outlined in the Report of the Executive Commission, to-wit:*

“1. That the co-operative movement, as above specified, be one of agencies of evangelical churches.

“2. That in the proposed co-operation the Presbyterian Church shall function through the Committee on the New Era Movement.

“3. That the co-operation shall involve the following features:

“a. A common survey of the Home and Foreign fields.

“b. A united propaganda to reach the whole Protestant Church of North America in educational and inspirational campaigns.

“c. A simultaneous campaign to raise the budget.

“d. A full presentation to the Inter-Church World Movement of the Presbyterian budget for all the Boards and agencies, as approved by the Executive Commission.

“4. That the co-operation shall be upon the condition that funds raised by the Presbyterian churches and agencies shall be paid to and distributed through the regular channels of the Presbyterian Church.

“5. That no financial obligation for the administrative ex-



pense of the Inter-Church World Movement shall be incurred by any of our Boards or agencies without the authorization of the General Assembly or its Executive Commission."

#### FEDERAL UNION.

The Committee on Church Co-operation and Union had negotiated with a similar committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States a Plan of Federal Union, which was published in the Blue Book. Along with it was also published a minority report, signed by five members of the committee, who dissented from the Plan of Federal Union on the grounds that "it is not the organic union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States, which one hundred and ninety-five Presbyteries and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. set out in 1917 to achieve"; that it "is only a loose federation which does not remove the evils of the present unhappy and wasteful division"; that "it does not differ materially from the existing Plan of the Reformed Council of the Reformed Churches," and that "it is a cumbersome and costly piece of ecclesiastical machinery which will increase expense without rendering in return any adequate service. In short, it is not worth while." The minority therefore recommended that "the Assembly proceed no further with the proposed Plan, and that the Assembly instruct its Committee on Church Co-operation and Union to continue its efforts to open the way for organic union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States in particular, and with our affiliated Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in general, and to prosecute the movement, which it already has initiated under the direction of the General Assembly of 1918, to bring about the union of the Evangelical Churches of America."

The committee in presenting the Federal Plan accompanied it with an introductory and explanatory statement, in which it said: "It is fair to state that we have co-operated with the Committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in framing a Plan of Federation which, while not satisfactory as

an expression of complete unity, is nevertheless the best that could be done at this time. Our conference with the brethren has been profitable, delightful and progressive. We regret sincerely that the Plan is not more satisfactory, and await further directions from the General Assembly. Further, in relation to this report it is necessary to state that your committee was not officially informed as to the purpose of the Committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States to take separate action as to the use to be made of the tentative plan of Federal Union. In response to a letter addressed to the chairman of the U. S. Committee, soon after the Pittsburgh meeting, answer was given by him to the effect that it was the intention of his committee to recommend the substitution of the Outline adopted at Pittsburgh for the Plan of Federal Union of the Council of the Reformed Churches in the United States holding the Presbyterian system. Immediately upon receipt of this communication, the chairman of your committee addressed a letter to all its members on the subject, and as a result received from each his dissent to such proposed use. The chairman then called a meeting of the Executive Committee, which was attended by seven members, to whom this particular matter was submitted. The Executive Committee after due consideration approved said document as a part of the report to the General Assembly, and authorized the chairman to send it and a statement as to the proposed use of the Plan of Federal Union to the chairman of the other committee. The Executive Committee, further, in its action declared that our committee had no intention to consent to the substitution proposed, nor was such intention officially disclosed to us at the conference." The committee therefore incorporated with its report as presented in the Blue Book a statement that "To this proposed substitution your committee cannot lend its support. The Plan of Federal Union of the Council of the Reformed Churches was approved by this General Assembly at its last meeting, and since has been approved by the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, and the General Assembly of the

Cumberland Presbyterian Church, colored. . . . Your committee cannot but feel that this proposal on the part of the Committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States will have the effect of placing hindrances in the way of the plans of co-operation which are the result of years of tactful and fraternal negotiations, and which are vital to the fellowship of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of the United States."

This is the shape in which the matter stood at the opening of the General Assembly as presented in the Blue Book. It was evident that the Plan of Federal Union under the changed conditions was no longer acceptable to the majority of the Committee on Church Co-operation and Union, and a meeting of all the members present at St. Louis was held to consider the situation. This discussion resulted in the adoption of the following resolution, which was presented to the Assembly and unanimously adopted by it: "*Resolved*, That the part of the report dealing with the Presbyterian Church in the United States be placed upon the docket, and that the following message be telegraphed at once to the Presbyterian General Assembly in session at New Orleans, La.: 'The Presbyterian General Assembly in session at St. Louis, Mo., in the matter of the Report of the Committee on Church Co-operation and Union rejoices that the two committees of our two churches have made some progress for a better understanding of our relations and the possibilities of united action in the Lord's work. This General Assembly states that it is not prepared to substitute the Plan of Federal Union contained in the joint report to the two Assemblies for the Plan of Federal Union already in operation through the Council of the Reformed Churches in America, but expresses again its preference for such a union as will eliminate all competition between our churches, and hereby in a most fraternal way asks the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States to continue negotiations with a view to a more satisfactory Plan of Union.'"

This action had the effect of setting aside both the majority

and minority reports, and what was expected to create a great debate in the Assembly was practically heard of no more.

In due time the following telegram was received from New Orleans: "Our Assembly in response to your message of yesterday send the following: The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States has referred to a committee composed of one from each Synod, to be appointed by the Synod, the report of the Ad-Interim Committee on Federal Union, together with other papers bearing on relations with other churches, this committee to consider the whole question of closer relations, to report to the next General Assembly. Thomas H. Law, Stated Clerk."

This action, together with the fact, which was soon reported, that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States had rejected, by a vote of 135 to 100, the Plan of Federal Union, gave great encouragement to the Assembly that the way was opened for a new consideration of the subject of the union of these two churches that may lead to a satisfactory solution of the problem.

It thus turned out that the three matters that it was expected would create debate and serious division in the Assembly, the New Era Movement, the Inter-Church World Movement, and the Plan of Federal Union, were all smoothed out into satisfactory, harmonious results.

#### THE WOMAN QUESTION.

One of the breeziest debates in the Assembly was occasioned by majority and minority reports from the Committee on Polity over the question of admitting women to ordination as elders and ministers. Overtures on the subject had come up from three Presbyteries asking for action on the matter. The majority of the committee recommended no action, but the minority recommended that the matter be committed to a special committee of five members to report to the next Assembly. This precipitated a debate involving the whole question of woman's rights in the churches, and all shades of opinion found

expression. The retiring Moderator, Rev. Dr. J. Frank Smith, whose recent illness did not permit him to take an active part in the proceedings, made his only speech before the Assembly on this subject, and it was a characteristic one. He said that when as a young man he was trying to teach school he one day heard a great racket outside the schoolhouse, and dashing out he saw a team of horses with a wagon running away, and getting in their way to try to stop them he was run over by the horses and by the wagon; while getting up and holding a bump on his head a pair of mules came rushing along and ran over him again. "Ever since that experience," said Dr. Smith, "I have been cautious about getting in the way of anything, and so I do not want to get in the way of woman's rights in the Church or in the State." A great many other men felt in the same way, and so the matter went to a special committee to be appointed by the Moderator, and we shall hear from it next year.

#### THE ASSEMBLY AND THE PRESIDENT.

It was a highly patriotic Assembly, and any reference to the war and the soldiers usually brought forth applause. A great Presbyterian service flag hung back of the Moderator's chair, which announced that 203,000 members of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. had entered the war service of the government, and of these 5,099 had laid down their lives. The Assembly was very appreciative of President Wilson, and yet it may also be said that it handled him without gloves. On three successive days it handed him two laudatory compliments with a stinging rebuke sandwiched between. The first resolution related to the defeat "of German militarism" and "the League of Nations," in which the Assembly said, "we commend and endorse President Wilson in his efforts, both at home and abroad, to establish the principles of a just and enduring peace." The next morning the Assembly learned of the action of the President in relation to war-time prohibition, and it forthwith "Resolved. That this Assembly learns with pain that the President of the United States has recommended to Congress that

it repeal a part of war-time prohibition, and in view of this fact we most earnestly petition Congress that it not only retain the measure, but that it be enforced to the fullest extent, to the end that the needs of the world for food be met and that the efficiency and morale of our people be conserved, and that this be telegraphed to Congress and the President." It should be said that in the resolution as originally adopted the word "pain" was followed by "and shame," but the next morning the Moderator, who was not present when the resolution was adopted, indicated his unwillingness to sign the resolution in this form, and at his request the words "and shame" were eliminated. By the next day the Assembly was again in good humor with the President when it had "learned with great satisfaction" of his reference in his message to Congress to "the genuine democratization of industry," and it did "heartily approve of the President's courageous, wise and timely deliverance."

#### THE ASSEMBLY AND LABOR INTERESTS.

The Assembly repeatedly showed its interest in the whole matter of labor and capital in their mutual relations. It adopted the following resolution and sent two delegates bearing it as a greeting: "Resolved, That the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. sends its fraternal greetings to the Order of Railway Conductors and Telegraphers, meeting at this time in this city. Every body of men in convention these days faces the same problem to help create a new and righteous social order with fairness and justice to all. This can be done, we believe, only by the application of Christian principles with the honest acceptance of the Golden Rule. In so far as you are seeking this result, your Convention and the General Assembly are engaged in a similar undertaking, and we give you God-speed. Please accept our good will and best wishes." This brought in return Vice-President Carey, of the Conductors' Association, bearing a similar greeting from the president of his order. Mr. Carey, who is a Roman Catholic, in addressing the Assembly, said: "This is one of the most

unique positions I have ever found myself in, but I rather enjoy it." He said that while he did not worship in the same way the Assembly did, he worshipped the same God, and that "conductors as a body were believers in and followers of Christ who was crucified." His brief address made a happy impression on the Assembly, and Moderator Baer, in replying to him, said he did not know what his education was, but he would confer on him a new degree, that of M. S., Master of the Situation.

There were other fraternal delegates received, one headed by the Bishop, from the Missouri Diocesan Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, then in session in St. Louis, and a notable one consisting of representatives of French, Belgian, and Swiss Reformed and Scotch Presbyterian Churches, who made eloquent addresses, and were answered by the Moderator in a masterly response, which was the high water-mark of eloquence in the Assembly.

On the whole, the General Assembly of 1919 was one of the best Assemblies in recent years, if not in the history of the Church. It met in a great time when we are entering the new era, and all issues wear a new aspect and roll upon us new and tremendous responsibilities. It met these issues courageously and hopefully and, we believe, wisely, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America has every reason to thank God and take courage.