



3 1735 056 289 899

Quarter-Centennial

—OF THE—

PITTSBURGH

R. P. Congregation.

1866 to 1891.

QUARTER-CENTENNIAL

OF THE

Pittsburgh Congregation

OF THE

COVENANTER CHURCH.

1866 TO 1891.

THE COVENANTER PUBLISHING CO.
13 UNION AVENUE, ALLEGHENY, PA.

“Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all.”

I congratulate you, on this happy anniversary occasion, upon the honorable record of the church, of which you are part, in the work of reform.

ADDRESS OF DR. J. W. SPROULL.

We meet this evening for the purpose of bringing to a close the exercises connected with the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Reformed Presbyterian or Covenanter Congregation of Pittsburgh. *Covenanter*—the term is not a new one. The whole country is familiar with it, and knows something of the belief, the history and the struggles of the small body so called. At present Covenanters are not looked upon with special favor. The very name is regarded by many as a synonym for narrowness, illiberality, intolerance, bigotry: a reminder of those other days when independent thinking on religious matters was regarded as a crime, and the boot, the rack and the gibbet were among the most effective arguments for its prevention.

This is not strange. Any denomination that has views so peculiar: that, for instance, maintains that the Lord Jesus Christ is a real king; that nations not acknowledging his authority and serving him are in actual rebellion against him, and that his loyal subjects should “refuse to incorporate by any act” with political bodies so long as they thus remain, must expect to be misunderstood, ridiculed and opposed. It is not at all surprising, that, in our own State, good conscien-

tious men are advocating the enactment of a law requiring, under severe penalties, all citizens entitled to vote, to do so, for the special purpose of reaching those whose consciences will not allow them to exercise the right of suffrage as matters now are.

Such a denomination must expect more than misrepresentation and opposition from without. There will necessarily be, to a greater or less extent all the time, internal agitation. The pressure from outside, constantly increasing; the bond uniting all Christ-lovers, daily growing stronger; the common work in which the different denominations are now engaged, so well calculated to minimize differences and bring prominently into view points of agreement; the great sacrifice required to maintain consistently the distinctive position; the seemingly hopelessnes of the cause and inadequacy of the means to the end—all tend to bring about modification of views, which will necessarily result in efforts to effect a change in the position of the body.

As the result of this constant struggle for existence, one of two things is inevitable. Either there will be a casting off of the disturbing element. Those who treat as of minor importance what the majority regard as vital will not be long tolerated. The contest must come, and if there is sufficient vitality in the body, with but one result. Or if there is not sufficient vitality, if the distinctive principles are formally or practically abandoned, then sooner or later will follow disintegration and absorption by larger denominations. Certain causes, as, for instance, large endowments, may delay, but they cannot prevent it. This is right. Organizations that have no reason for existence should cease to exist. Mere sentiment, pride, a past history, prejudice, do not justify their continuance. They are an incumbrance. Dead bodies should be buried, and so deep that they will not cause annoyance.

Taking for granted that our distinctive position justifies our separate existence, the question that is of greatest importance to us to-day is: How can we, in the present condition of society, with the pressure from without to abandon and from within to yield, resist these influences and continue to "hold fast." This question is of vital importance. It we must meet; it we must answer. Several things are necessary:

1. All applicants for membership should have clearly explained to them our position and what is required in order to its practical application. There must be no concealing or modifying or explaining away its plain meaning and the sacrifice required, in order to get new members.

2. Before being admitted, all applicants should be required to give an unhesitating and unqualified declaration of their approval of our principles as in accordance with Scripture, and their intention to conform to them in practice so long as they continue with us.

3. Professions of belief in these great principles should be made in humble reliance upon Almighty God, and with a firm persuasion of their ultimate triumph. Without this reliance the truth, if held at all, will not be held in love. Without the firm persuasion, efforts will relax. The "lion in the way" will soon check endeavors to "go forward."

4. Church courts should enforce impartially the law. There must be no closing of the eyes where are actual violations; no respecting of persons. If the views of members become so modified that they no longer accept of our position or conform to our practice, they should leave; or, if they refuse, be required to go where they will be more at home and do less harm. If she is to maintain her distinctive position, the church must *enforce with discipline* her teachings. Here has been our weakness of late years. Our principles have been assailed and practice violated with impunity by our own mem-

bers. There must be a change or our days as a church are numbered. Unless impartially and consistently enforced, all declarations of loyalty to principles and determination to maintain them, however strong such declarations may be, proclaim only the weakness and insincerity of those who make them. The church that so does will soon lose the confidence of her own members and the respect of those beyond her pale.

5. Presbyteries and Synod should see that due importance is given to this subject in all our congregations and stations. If there be a disposition on the part of either ministers or sessions to ignore what is distinctive, such action should be taken, and promptly, as will neutralize the harmful effects of such neglect. Oversight should be exercised. Here "the ounce of prevention is worth pounds of cure."

If what has been said be true, and surely no one will question it, it is very evident that the future of the church depends largely on her ministry. The pastor, who is loved and trusted by his people, moulds to a very great extent the congregation over which he is placed. That Covenanter minister, who in his pulpit ministrations and in his private intercourse, clearly, earnestly and wisely dwells upon our distinctive position, keeps himself well informed on the different phases of the question relating to it, answers to the best of his ability the objections that are constantly being presented, faithfully yet kindly deals with all violators of the law, will have a congregation of intelligent and consistent Covenanters: elders and people, men, women and children, one and all. If, however, the distinctive principles are seldom referred to, or presented in a half-hearted, apologetic way; if appeals are made wholly to feeling, pride, past history, prejudice, personal motives, etc., etc., and little or no solid instruction is given, the congregation may increase in numbers and influence; it may cling to its pastor in a right loyal support, and be true to the ec-

clesiastical organization as long as he continues with it, but when the inevitable trial comes, then comes also the falling away. The bond of union not being based on principle, but on personal relations or passing feeling, is easily severed. Yes, to a very large extent as Covenanter ministers believe and preach her principles, will her members believe and practice them.

This evening we have an illustration of what has just been stated. It is the Reformed Presbyterian or Covenanter congregation of Pittsburgh, whose twenty-fifth anniversary we celebrate. For a quarter of a century a Covenanter congregation has been in existence here, and still flourishes. What does this mean? It means that the members have been taught the principles of the church so that they understand the profession they have made, and are prepared to maintain it. It is for the same reason our church flourishes in this Western Pennsylvania as in no other locality, although in no other has it been so violently assailed. Here the truth has been presented so wisely as not unnecessarily to repel, and hence there has been steady growth; so clearly, and forcibly that there has never been, since 1833, a great falling away.

As we meet here to-night, there lies in the city on the other side of the river, on his bed of sickness, an aged servant of God, the first pastor of our congregation in these cities after the division. To him the church in this land owes a debt it has never paid, and never can pay; a debt certainly as great as it owes to any other. No one that knew him ever questioned his belief in the principles that distinguish us from others. No one long under his ministry remained in ignorance of them, or of his reasons for accepting and preaching them. One of your elders, not then a member of our church, told me of a sermon that father preached many years ago relating to Christ's mediatorial rule which made an impression on his mind never

afterwards effaced. Of the twenty elders in these three congregations fifteen were for a time at least under his ministry. Whatever may be the result of present difficulties, watch carefully the course they take who for but a little listened to his preaching, and you will see the effect of faithful presentation of truth. That father passed through one crisis of the Covenanter church, and has lived to lift up his voice on behalf of what he believes to be the truth in discussions which, we fear, are preparing the way for another crisis. The message I bring this evening from his bed side is, "Hold fast, and wait. Jesus is the king and Jesus reigns."

Because such emphasis is placed upon Christ's mediatorial authority it does not follow that Covenanters are illiberal and narrow. No. We pronounce no judgment on others. We do not claim to be infallible. Possibly we may be mistaken in some matters we regard as very essential. It may be the future will show that others are nearer right than we. But this we say: With the light God has given us, these principles we must accept and this practice we must enforce. Because we give so much importance to Christ's headship over nations it must not be supposed that we regard it as preeminently the one truth which the church should preach. No. There are others which in their place are equally important. Evangelization, Foreign Missions, Church Union, which, when accomplished, will remove the greatest scandal to-day of Christendom, the division of the body of Jesus Christ, are second to no other. We emphasize the doctrine of Christ's headship because it is so much neglected, and because its presentation is especially needed in the present condition of society.

And now, as we close these anniversary exercises, let us see that we are better prepared because of them to render loyal service to him who is our Saviour and our King. With hearts full of gratitude for past goodness, let us resolve anew to yield

our wills wholly to his, and, if it should so happen, that in answer to our prayers, he shall reveal to us duty in a new and clearer light, let us be prepared to walk in that light and perform the duty regardless of ourselves and all other considerations. For it is only as we walk in the light we shall receive light.