



SEMI-CENTENNIAL SERMON

GIVEN AT THE

FIFTIETH ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE SYNOD OF MICHIGAN, IN MONROE,
OCTOBER 10, 1884.

BY REV. J. AMBROSE WIGHT, D. D.

FIFTY YEARS

OF THE SYNOD OF MICHIGAN:

A DISCOURSE,

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*Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they
live forever?—Zechariah 1: 5.*



DISCOURSE.

If what is now to be said is to be considered a sermon, which properly it is not, a befitting text may be found in the Prophecy of Zechariah 1: 5—

Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever!

The Synod of Michigan covers the territory of the lower peninsula of the State, and consists of 167 ministers, 185 churches, and 17,125 members.

It was organized, by direction of the General Assembly, at Ann Arbor, on the 23d of September, 1834; three years before the disruption of the Presbyterian Church. Michigan was then a Territory, not being erected into a State till the year 1837.

The sermon was preached at the organization by Rev. George Eastman, from Ezekiel 33:11. Three Presbyteries, viz.: Detroit,^a Monroe^b and St. Joseph constituted the Synod. Of these there were present

^a The Presbytery of Detroit was constituted by the act of the General Assembly (see Minutes of 1827, p. 120), and convened the 8th day of September, 1828. Ministers present—Revs. Noah M. Wells, William Page, Érie Prince, Isaac W. Ruggles. Elders present—Stephen C. Henry, from the Church in Detroit; Stephen V. R. Trowbridge, from the Church in Pontiac; Erastus Ingersoll, from the Church in Farmington. The Church at Ann Arbor and that at Dixborough were received at the same time.

^b The Presbytery of Monroe was constituted by act of the Synod of Western Reserve, October, 1833. It was set off from the Presbytery of Detroit, and was composed of ministers and churches located in the territory, south of the Base Line, and east of the Grand Meridian, except the county of Wayne. This included the counties of Washtenaw, Lenawee, Monroe, half of Jackson, and a part of Lucas County, Ohio.

The first meeting was held at Tecumseh, February 12, 1834. The sermon was preached by Rev. Reuben Armstrong, who was chosen Moderator.

The ministers present were R. Armstrong, John Beach, Charles G. Clarke, P. W. Warriner, I. M. Weed and A. S. Wells. The Elders were Joseph Farrington, Ashel Finch, Willard Goff, Lorin Mills, Jacob Bacon and S. J. Keeler—the latter from the new church of Port Lawrence (Toledo) and Moses Kingsley. I. M. Weed was Stated Clerk.

from *Detroit* Presbytery, John P. Cleveland, George Eastman and Albert Worthington; from *Monroe*, John Beach, Charles G. Clarke, Ira M. Wead, Ashbel S. Wells, E. Bouton and John G. Kanouse; from *St. Joseph*, Noah M. Wells, P. W. Warriner and George Hornell, ministers.

The elders were Ezra Carpenter, Israel Branch, Moses Kingsley, Mason Hatfield, Henry Disbrow, Obadiah Rogers, Asahel Finch, Jr., Isaac Smith, Thomas Sale, Henry Tibbetts, Amos Mead and Charles P. Cowden—twelve ministers and twelve elders; though what churches the elders represented, is not stated in the Synod's Minutes; nor is any list of the churches belonging to the body given, till the third year of its existence. The absences were: from *Detroit* Presbytery five, and *St. Joseph* three.

Rev. Phanael W. Warriner was chosen Moderator; John P. Cleveland, Stated Clerk; A. S. Wells, Permanent, and I. M. Wead, Temporary Clerk; Rev. Harvey P. Coe was Corresponding Member.

Thus was launched the Synod of Michigan, which now accomplishes fifty years of its life.

The history of the Synod is not only concurrent with that of the country, but the subjects it considers, the views taken of them, the feelings entertained in regard to them, and the impulses to which they gave rise, are a part of that same history itself. Our account might, for convenience, be divided into three parts, viz.: That ending with the disruption, that from the division till the re-union, and that since the re-union.

But as the Records of the Synod contain no notice of the division and no reference to the reunion further than is necessary for reconstruction, I prefer the more philosophical division which marks the phases of its doings and experience. The reign of the "Plan of Union" marks one era; the fading out of that plan, and the reassertion of distinctive Presbyterianism, marks another. The Plan of Union was in full and successful operation till 1850 or thereabouts, and continued in partial operation some years longer. It is characterized by the evident mixture of two systems, which in their genius are separate and different. The bond of the Union was, a common faith expressing itself in a sameness of worship. The dissimilarity is in the differing ideas of church constitution and the machinery of church propagation. The theory of their harmonious union rose from a spirit eminently Chris-

tian, but practical difficulties in the way of harmonious action were discovered by experience. In following the doings of the Synod we encounter in its earlier years the continued mention of "societies" and "agents" for the carrying on of the work of the church. The friction engendered in their working became in after years too great for harmony, and eventually aided in breaking up the plan. For a time the Synod transforms itself, in turn, into Home, and Foreign Missionary, and Education *societies*; appoints, listens to, directs, and receives its impulse from *agents*; the machinery native to the Presbyterian system lying, for the most part, idle.

But before further treating of these matters, we need to look a little into the subject of *organization*.

The three Presbyteries of the beginning gradually increased in number and changed their boundaries. That of St. Joseph^c at first included a tier of counties in the State of Indiana. The two Presbyteries of Washtenaw and Marshall make their appearance at the fourth meeting, 1838; the first with six ministers, the second with one. In 1839 is added the Presbytery of Kalamazoo, with three ministers.

In 1841 a list of the connected churches is given. The Presbytery of Detroit has 34, Monroe 28, St. Joseph 27, Washtenaw 16, Marshall 16, Kalamazoo 3, or 124 in all. In 1844 appears the Presbytery of *Ionia* with one minister and no elder in attendance, but with four absentee ministers. The attendance from this Presbytery was doubled the next year, there being two ministers present, but still no elder. The gain, however, was but temporary, for the next year there were none in attendance; and the year after still none. Absence seems to be in fact the besetting liability of this limb of the Synod, reminding us that the State was new, that railroads had not reduced distances, and

^c The Presbytery of St. Joseph was formed out of the Presbytery of Detroit by act of the Synod of Western Reserve. It included the territory west of the grand meridian. Its first meeting was held at Gull Prairie Feb. 5, 1834. It included in 1850 the following churches in Indiana, viz.: Greenfield, Bristol, LaPorte, Mishawaka, Orland, Haw Patch, Elkhart, Goshen, Salem, Harris Prairie, Van Buren, Angola, York, Northport and Brockville.

Rev. S. J. Porter preached the opening sermon. Luther Humphrey was Moderator; and besides there was present William Jones; Rev. Christopher Corey asked to be received as a member.

The Elders were Jeremiah Henry, Thos. M. Stanley, John Howard and Samuel Woodward. S. J. Porter was Stated Clerk.

The churches represented were Richland, Prairie Ronde and White Pigeon. George N. Smith was received as candidate for the ministry.

that our denominational weakness since then on that side of the State is not altogether a novelty.

The printing of the Synod's Minutes began in 1850, and, with two years' exception, has been since continued. There are at that date, 95 ministers, 118 churches, and 7,538 members. The baptisms that year of adults is 116, of infants 192; the benevolent contributions are \$3,-124.16. In 1851 the Synod consists of six Presbyteries, that of Ionia having faded out. In 1856 that of St. Joseph drops also from the roll, leaving but 73 ministers, 84 churches, and 6,567 members; but the contributions have advanced to \$9,008.14.

The year 1857 marks the birth of two additional Presbyteries—Coldwater and Saginaw, and the year following, 1858, those of Grand River Valley and Lake Superior make their appearance. But distance and lack of roads are still obstacles to attendance, and the delegates of the latter are seldom seen, till in 1866 it petitions for, and is granted leave, to join its more accessible neighbor, Wisconsin, where it still abides.

The ninth member is, however, still present in the Presbytery of Lansing, and so we remain till 1870, when the capitals O. S. and N. S. become obsolete. But a Presbytery wearing the former pair of fardels had been organized in 1840, and became a factor in the 1870 reunion, viz.: the Presbytery of Michigan.

The places of the Synod's meeting are as follows: at Detroit six times; at Adrian and at Kalamazoo four times each; at Marshall, Monroe and Ypsilanti three times each; at Ionia, Saginaw City, Lansing, Coldwater, Tecumseh, Battle Creek, Niles, and White Pigeon, twice each; at Jackson, Flint, Hillsdale, Pontiac, Three Rivers, Grand Rapids, Bay City, Allegan and Howell, once each.

Of the men connected with the body some have fallen on sleep, some have gone to labors elsewhere and a part remain. None of the original members are now with us. One alone remains, and is still engaged in ministerial duty. I allude to Rev. Albert Worthington, whose residence is at New Grenna, New Jersey, and whose connection is with the Presbytery of West Jersey, Synod of New Jersey. The last to depart this life was Rev. Ashbel S. Wells, who died in 1882, in the State of Iowa, in the Congregational connection. The name of Rev. E. E.

Gregory is added to the roll the second year of its meeting. 1835. He departed this life in 1883.

The names of Rev. H. H. Northrop, and LeMoyne S. Smith, first occur in 1839, though Mr. Northrop became a member of the Synod a year earlier. In 1842. Rev. Seth Hardy is recognized. In 1844, Revs. Wm. S. Taylor, Milton Bradley, A. H. Gaston and Norman Tucker, and in 1845 Rev. J. G. Atterbury, appear on the Synod's Roll—these being still with us.

Of those connected with the body previous to 1846, and who have been generally present at its meetings while living during the past 20 years, but who have departed this life, there occur the names of I. M. Wead, Noah M. Wells, Calvin Clark, Alfred Bryant, George Duffield, Justin Marsh, H. S. Hamilton, E. J. Boyd and John McLaren. These brethren and fathers are first recognized in Synod, as follows: Messrs. Wead and Wells, in 1834; Clark and Bryant, 1838; Duffield and Marsh, 1839; Hamilton, 1842; Boyd, 1843; and McLaren, 1844.

It cannot be expected that I follow the list of names which fifty years supply with even a mention of them, much less, that I attempt any appreciation of service, since I might do injustice at every step.

Of the churches originally connected there is no record in the Synod's Minutes. Some of them had, however, been in existence for several years. Those of Detroit and Monroe we believe to be the oldest; that of Detroit being organized, as a partially Presbyterian church, in 1818, and the organization being completed in 1825^d; that

d. The First Presbyterian Church of Detroit came into being in this wise: Rev. John Montieth was commissioned by the Board of Missions of the General Assembly as a missionary to Eastern Michigan June 6, 1816, and soon thereafter commenced his labors accordingly. On the 5th of August following, a society was organized for the support of religious worship by citizens of the Protestant faith. It was called the First Protestant Society of the city of Detroit.

In 1818 a church was organized, partaking somewhat of the features and doctrines of a Presbyterian Church. At the time of this organization J. Dening, Levi Brown and Samuel Shattuck were chosen and ordained as Ruling Elders.

Funds were collected abroad for the building of a place of worship in 1819 to the amount of \$1,122.46, and a church edifice at once erected, costing \$7,000.

In October, 1821, the Society was reorganized and Trustees elected.

In January, 1825, Articles of Faith were adopted which fully committed the Society to the Presbyterian doctrines and form of Government. The Church then numbered 12 male and 37 female members.

Mr. Montieth left in 1821. Rev. Noah M. Wells became Pastor May, 1825.

of Monroe being fully organized in 1820. Other churches may be nearly as old as these.

There have been connected with the Synod from the beginning, as accurately as they can be counted, 626 ministers. Taking from these, the 167 at present connected, 459 have departed, or, an average of nine per year. It is impossible to say, how many of these have laid down their burdens. Probably a majority of them are still in life. Of a large number of the 626, it may be said, that their names occur on the Roll but once or twice. They simply make obeisance, "and straight are seen no more." The talent of many, though remaining in connection, for staying from attendance is very conspicuous. Again and again does the Synod deliberate as to "what can be done to secure a better attendance at its meetings," but with no seeming improvement. I should be disposed to volunteer the excuse of distance and bad roads, but that since distance is reduced by good roads, attendance is not improved. True, it is still to be confessed that travel costs, and the Home Missionary has no superabundance, and the churches do not always share the expense of their minister's journey to the place of meeting.

But perhaps that which most concerns us, in this consideration, is *The Work of the Synod.*

The first business, after organization, is given in the following resolution:

WHEREAS, The Synod of Michigan recognizes the command of Jesus Christ, to preach the gospel to every creature, as binding on all Christians, to aid, according to their ability, in sending the gospel to all the nations of the earth; therefore,

Resolved, That this Synod deem it expedient to form themselves into a Foreign Missionary Society Auxiliary to the Foreign Missionary Society of the Valley of the Mississippi.

Officers were accordingly chosen, and the resolution fortified with the pledge "That the members of the Synod will do all in their power

e. The First Presbyterian Church of Monroe was organized January, 1820, by Rev. Moses Hunter and John Montieth.

The articles of Faith were such as admitted of the Union of representatives of the various evangelical denominations resident in the place. The church consisted of 20 members. Its first Pastor was Rev. P. W. Warriner, in 1829.

Wolcott Lawrence and Joseph Farrington were ordained as Elders in May, 1820.

f. The Church in Ann Arbor was organized in 1826; that in Tecumseh, 1829; that in Ypsilanti, 1829 or '30; First Plymouth in Northville, 1829; Adrian, 1832; and that of Farmington 1833 or before. The Second Presbyterian Church of Plymouth was organized in 1833. These statements are made by Rev. W. W. Wetmore in his Semi-Centennial Sermon of the Second Church of Plymouth, February, 1883.

to raise their just proportion of the sum of \$1,500 for the cause, the present year." Whether the \$1,500 was raised is not stated. It is hoped that it was.

An organization was also effected, at this session, in aid of Home Missions, similar to that for Foreign.

It is apparent that success in these efforts rested very much on the presence of agents, to excite interest and give direction and secure movement. Their presence is always had and is a part of the proceedings. The Synod recounts that "the agents of Benevolent Societies experience much inconvenience and embarrassment from interference with each other's operations." A committee is therefore appointed to make arrangements to obviate this difficulty.

The outcome was that the time for collections, by separate months, was fixed for the four following causes, viz.: Foreign Missions, Home Missions, Tract Distribution and the Education Society.

This primal inauguration of Missionary interest, as the first work of the first session, marks the course of this body for the whole fifty years. This Synod is by emphasis a Missionary organization. At none of its sessions is this matter overlooked or omitted.

Missionary work has grown with its growth. For twenty years at least, as your speaker can testify, it has been all but the sole matter of consideration, and may truthfully be said to constitute the object for which the Synod exists.

The two great systems of machinery, Home and Foreign, which in fact carry on one work, are the body of the whole, but have adjunct branches, of which the two, Ministerial Education and a Religious Literature, are coeval in our history, but in these are aided by others, to the number of four, at present.

Among the subsidiary forces to help on the gospel's spread and effectiveness at once entered upon at the first session is that of *Temperance*.

Those who are accustomed to date the beginning of this movement to Washingtonianism, as is often heard, are either careless readers or have poor memories. Aggressive temperance, with the Pledge as its instrument, began eight years ago when the Synod met, 1826, or thereabouts, while Washingtonianism dates to 1840, fourteen years after. Its substantial victory had been won before that time, and had the

nation continued to consist of the persons it then did, with their descendants and them only, it were a victory still.

The terms in which the Synod's action is couched are worthy of notice:

Resolved, That this Synod solemnly believes the use, manufacture and sale of ardent spirits in all cases, except for mechanical and medicinal purposes, to be morally wrong, and ought to be immediately and universally abandoned.

Resolved, further, That the Synod earnestly recommend to all churches of this body to require those received into them to signify their determination to abstain as above.

To ardent spirits was added "narcotics"—specifically tobacco, and a pledge was signed by all the members to abstain both from spirits and tobacco, "except as a medicine;" the reason being given for such abstinence, in addition to others, that its use "is contrary to domestic refinement."

The subject of Temperance continued to be enforced from time to time by resolutions, and yet so continues. Whether a relative gain has been made since that time may admit perhaps of question.

Under the reign of State prohibition, 1859, after four years' experience, it is noticed that liquors continue to be sold in spite of the law. Previous to this, in 1844, it is proposed, "Shall the question of license to sell be submitted to vote in the town meetings," and the answer is of approval. In these times this is called "local option." Two years after, 1846, the subject regarding tobacco is brought in again, with the question, "Shall Synod express an opinion on the use of tobacco?" but it is summarily laid on the table. Health and domestic refinement it is presumed are sufficiently secure, or perhaps forgotten.

The *Sabbath* became a matter of consideration in 1835, and is from that time a frequent subject of very long reports and of earnest discussion. "Synod laments that Congress has not prohibited mail service on that day, and petitions that such service be not performed in the State of Michigan;" all of which reminds us of the monster petitions which went to Congress in favor of discontinuing the mails on the Sabbath, and the answer to them by Mr. Johnson, of Kentucky, which Congress sustained. When rail cars visit the State, the Synod's action is adverse to their Sabbath running. In 1859 the stoppage of Sabbath work by the Central Railroad is commended.

The first action of the body regards Sabbath violation a principal cause of the spiritual darkness and declension which prevails. And

the Synod pledge themselves to an immediate, steady, uncompromising discipline wherever such violation is committed by members of our churches, or "by members of other churches residing within our bounds!"

A catalogue of specimen Sabbath desecration is given, such as travel, secular business, giving or receiving social visits, or the owning of stock in establishments, such as stage companies, railroads, steam-boats, etc., which are employed in open violation of that day.

To elench the business a full report was to be required at next Synod of what each member had done in the premises. It is worth observing that the report was not forgotten, the answers the succeeding year showing diligence.

A good part of the attention of the Body in its earlier years is devoted to matters of morals and what was then called "Reform." There were many things in Church and State, in those times, which agitated sections of the country and sometimes the entire nation. Excitement on one great theme begat questions in other matters; and sometimes which had no very evident connection with it, but seemed to be simply the product of an aroused mental and moral condition of the public mind.

Thus "War" is one of the earliest matters of consideration at this first meeting in 1834—"And it is unanimously voted, that war in all cases is incompatible with the spirit and principles of the gospel, unless by express command of God, as to the Hebrews: 'And it is the duty of Christians to decline military service: and all who do are equally entitled, with the Society of Friends, to exemption from such service.'" This action was thought so important that it was directed, "that the Clerk print and forward a copy of it to the Secretary of the American Peace Society for more extensive publication."

These good fathers did not yet see their own sons leaping to war, and dying in battle, and with no express command of God either, as sanction, as the Hebrews had; nor had they yet the opportunity, to realize the wide difference between a mere theory and a question of practice in this thing.

But the great question for discussion, for thirty years, was that of *Slavery*. This was also brought before the Body at the session of 1834.

It may not be out of place to remark, that the National Govern-

ment was founded in compromise; the Union being of colonies, grown into States, in part free and in part with the institution of slavery. The fathers chose that this should be a Nation, on that basis—for no other was at the time possible—rather than a congeries of straggling settlements, jealous of each other, and with no consideration before the European powers, at whose mercy, commercially and politically, they would be. It was with immense and protracted solicitude and labor, that the Union was at length so effected. But such was its immense importance, that some mutual sacrifice was deemed better, than a State independency.

And having effected the Union, its authors were exceedingly jealous of any irritation which threatened it. This feeling was spread, and transmitted; and was at the bottom of that series of yieldings and compromises with which the Northern Legislators were reproached during the period of angry discussion which preceded the war. It was also not undiscovered by Southern men that a threat of dissolving the Union was ordinarily sufficient to bring Northern men to terms. Nor was it an unnatural feeling of statesmen that though slavery was bad disunion was worse.

When the Government was first instituted, and for a period of years after, it was the general understanding of either party, that slavery would gradually disappear, by action of the several States to which it confessedly belonged. And this expectation was sanctioned by the example of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania; which example it was supposed would soon be followed by the border States, where movements were already looking to such result. That other slave States would be added to the Union was scarcely thought of.

But a change gradually stole over the spirit of this dream. Cotton growing was found to be immensely profitable; and cotton was the product of slave labor, and so slaves became valuable. As these facts dawned on the Southern mind, the prospect of State emancipation faded; and the South began to look for an expansion of slave territory. And, as is often the case in our fallen world, the public mind of the South, from excusing what was a misfortune, began to turn toward the justification of that which it found profitable. The first crisis of this changed opinion and new endeavor came in 1820, when Missouri presented itself for admission to the Union, as a slave State. New Eng-

land objected. But Missouri came in, though with great excitement through the nation, and with the well known compromise, of the line 36:30, westward from the Mississippi River.

But though the excitement subsided for a time, the effort for slave expansion did not cease, but continually strengthened itself, till it culminated in civil war.

During the fourteen years, from 1820 to 1834, a party had arisen in the North, consisting of younger men, who, undeterred by threats of disunion, questioned the rightfulness of slavery, anywhere. The great body of the Northern people were disposed to abide faithfully by the original compact, and would acquiesce, though reluctantly, in the new arrangement of the Missouri compromise, dividing future accessions; but they were not ready to concede the new and growing demand for an unlimited expansion of slave territory; much less to throw open all the territory of the nation to slavery. But to this the thing grew from that Missouri agitation.

As slavery was not merely a question of politics, but of morals and religion, its agitation at once shook the churches and largely had its seat in them.

When our Synod met, General Jackson was in the Presidential Chair. The Texas egg was already incubating, though Texas was yet a part of Mexico. Nor was there wanting some question to keep alive the excitement, till the war came. Texas, Kansas and California, each in turn played its part, and were as oil on the fire. In every section of the country North and South there was growing agitation and debate, and division, according to the stand point from which slavery was looked at.

It is not strange then, that at the session of 1834, we find the Synod taking recess, "to allow the Anti-slavery Society of Lenawee County to occupy the house," and afterward buttressing its action by a resolution: "That Synod believes the holding of slaves, in this country, to be a sin against God and man, and that it ought immediately to cease; and that it is our duty, by all kind and Christian means, and especially by cultivating a spirit of sympathy for the enslaved, and of prayer for them and their masters, as well as by moderation in the dissemination of truth and light, to endeavor to hasten the happy day of universal emancipation."

Three years afterward, 1837, slaveholding is pronounced by the Synod "disciplinable." Of course the Synod had no occasion to put that resolution in force. In 1840, regret is expressed at the action of the General Assembly, which action had recommended to the Presbyteries to recal their action in excluding slaveholders from the communion.

In 1843 it is resolved that the right of petition to Congress against slavery exists, and that the Constitution is violated by refusal to receive such petitions. This recalls the contest of Hon. John Quincy Adams in the House of Representatives in that behalf. It is also declared the duty of all to petition Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia.

In 1854 a resolution rejoices in the progress of anti-slavery sentiment; and approves the action of the American Board in refusing aid to slaveholders among the Choctaw Indians. In 1856 moderation, to avert civil war, is counseled. But the outrage of Brooks, of South Carolina, upon Charles Sumner is condemned; and rejoicing is had over the reception of Kansas as a free State.

There is nowhere any approval or sympathy with the crazy and semi-treasonable utterances of the Garrison party, affirming the Constitution to be "a compact with death and an agreement with hell;" and that Church and Government, upholding slavery, as ours were alleged to do, ought to be destroyed. Its declarations are loyal and Christian, but always condemnatory of slavery, and contradict the assertion so often then and since made that the Northern Church upheld slavery. Specifically the Synod was an anti-slavery body, and prevailingly a body of what were known as "Abolitionists."

But it was not left to resolutions of bodies, ecclesiastical or other, to settle this incongruous compact of slavery and freedom. Nor was the North called upon to break its compact. God's providence laid that burden on the slaveholders themselves. The Kansas war to force slavery into free territory; the repeal of the Missouri compromise; the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court; the demand that slavery be protected in the free States; the fugitive slave law, and the threats to re-open the foreign slave trade, left the free States no alternative but determined *political* resistance; and when this brought secession and war there was no alternative but the battle; and the battle came.

And our justification is already coming. Men who fought through the war on the slavery side now say, "It was the best thing that could have happened, for it delivered us from the greatest curse the Nation ever knew." That such is the universal sentiment of the South it would be too much to say. But it is a growing sentiment there, and is destined to be general, when the new prosperity has obliterated the keener remembrances of the war.

I have dwelt on this one matter so long because it was the disturbing element in our churches, in our ecclesiastical and religious bodies, in our newspapers and in our families from 1820 to 1865—forty-five years. And with the older of us it was an experience which we shall never forget. For thirty years at the least it consumed more time, occupied more space, exhausted more thought, and awakened more passion, than all other public questions together. And well it might, for it concerned the existence of the nation. It was a question which was vital in gospel advance. We may well give thanks to-day that no question meets us to excite, distract and anger us, like this.

Of course during a period of fifty years the Synod found occasion for the entertainment of a great many questions of different magnitudes, things which for convenience we may call *miscellaneous*. Some of these occupy but a single mention. More often, however, they claim a repetition and then pass out of sight. But they show the mind of the times.

It may be thought singular, that while the Presbyterian Church was divided, and with much excitement, in 1837, no distinct mention is made of it in the Records. All things flow on as if nothing had happened. The reason doubtless is, that the Body was closely united with that part of the Presbyterian Church which took the title of New School, and suffered no jostle by the division. True, as said, a small Presbytery adhering to the Old School Body was organized, three years after the division, and so continued till the re-union of 1870; constituting the tenth Presbytery to be joined in the present Synod.

The earlier sessions of the Synod were fruitful in overtures; the second session giving birth to thirteen, while afterward they ran up to twenty.

The Education of a Ministry engrossed early interest, and was

returned to again and again. The organ of it at first was the Education Society, which became at once one of the four standard causes which occupied the attention of the body. But as early as 1843, the Synod ceased to elect officers to the Societies, and their anniversaries were soon after discontinued at its meetings.

In this connection the matter of a college was very early entertained. At the first session it was resolved that arrangements ought to be made immediately in the Territory, to secure a thorough Literary and Evangelical Education. And a committee of ten was appointed "to consult on the best location for a College for this Territory;" and committees continued to report from time to time, yet with no result, for many years. An attempt to found a college at Marshall, shared the fate of all other endeavors.

In 1854 there begins an expression of interest in the University, which continues to be repeated. In the same year Western Colleges are commended to young men seeking the gospel Ministry.

The establishment of a Theological Seminary is not entertained till 1860, when the report of the committee is "that the time for it is not yet come."

Sabbath Schools make their appearance in 1834, again in 1839, and more fully in 1849; yet only occasionally in the earlier days.

Common Schools are noticed, and the Bible recommended as a class book in them, in 1837. Parochial Schools are not favored, and receive but a single mention.

The subject of a Religious Newspaper gave our elder brethren a great deal of hard thinking. It begins in 1837 with the *Michigan Observer*, which is then rejoiced over, by resolution, for its prosperity; but after the manner of "prosperous papers" is suspended and bewailed, in 1844. It reappears as the *Evangelical Observer* in 1846, but ends in 1849; though managed by an "association of gentlemen." Yet undismayed, a committee is set to the task of the *Religious Telegraph* at Ann Arbor. In 1854 the *Chicago Evangelist* is commended to the churches; also the *Herald and Presbyterian*, at Cincinnati, and also the *Presbyterian Recorder*, at Chicago. Concerning two of these papers these friendly resolutions were utterly wasted.

Non-attendance at the Synod, as already said, was an early matter of uneasiness, being called up as if in anticipation at the first meeting.

Beginning thus early, it has continued late, and always with about the same measure of success. The absentees, "those habitually such," are exhorted again and again, but always like Glendower's call to the spirits of the vast deep. They do not come, in answer. Even the argument of 1837, that they not only come, "but *stay* through the session, so that the proper religious exercises can be given and enjoyed" is disregarded. Even the elders are complained of, that they stay away from Synod, following or giving example thus to the ministers.

Better statistics are required in 1838; that the Presbyteries report the number of church members "in each church," and also the numbers in the Sabbath Schools.

The Ottawa Indians, in the northwest of the Synod, are sympathized with, and the work commenced among them commended in 1838.

"Oberlin Perfectionism" is solidly condemned the next year—'39. Whether teachings of that sort had any connection with the appointment of a committee in 1834 to "draft rules for a *Christian life*, and specify *subjects of prayer*." I cannot say; but there was an idea afloat about this time that a map or chart of a Christian life could be made, which should show about all that was included in it.

A limited or rotary Eldership is disapproved of, but vainly, in 1841. The Presbyteries are required to make annual reports, from *all* the Presbyteries, of the names of their Elders, arranged in alphabetical order; and that the Sessions send their delegations to Presbytery and Synod "in that order."

"Does *one* Elder and a Stated Supply form a Session?" yes; but not for judicial purposes: whereat there is a protest.

Can Presbyteries license a minister for a limited time? 1840 says no; practice since says yes.

At that time—1840—ministers are exhorted to preach frequently on the subject of baptism, especially that of infants, the opponents of this practice being active in the churches.

How far shall ministers—1840—engage in political discussions? No answer. Perhaps at that time none could be given. Some seem to be answering it now.

The circus and the theatre are heartily disapproved in 1844, and the dance in 1866. Successfully?

Psalmody received early attention. The "Christian Psalmist" is commended to the churches in 1836, and the "Church Psalmist" in 1869.

The law of the State abolishing capital punishment for murder is repeatedly disapproved of, beginning with 1845; and a petition for its repeal is adopted in 1846.

The Pastoral Relation is a frequent subject of consideration from 1845 and onward; and Stated Supplies are discouraged.

"Four days' meetings," much in vogue in the eastern part of the Nation about the time of 1830, are considered in the Synod as late as 1849.

"Christ in National Affairs," of Scotch origin we should judge, is a matter of attention from 1863 to '67, and disappears in a long report at the latter session.

The marriage laws of the State are evidently not agreeable to the ministry. It would be strange if they were; and a petition to the Legislature for a license to be issued by the County Clerk, as the minister's warrant for celebrating marriage, was presented to the body for its adoption, but instead of adopting it as they ought, it was referred to a lawyer—who had no cause of complaint—instead of a minister who had, and he convinced the Synod, too easily, that the law was right as it was.

A question was asked concerning withdrawing from the ministry in 1869, and is answered by asking if the rules of 1834 are complied with, and Presbyteries are enjoined to enforce them; but it is not stated what the rules are.

The matter of a "Religion of Forms" occupies a share of consideration from 1843 to 1852. The motive power of discussion and report on the subject seems to be the inflow of a papal population into the State and country about that time, and the consequent encouragement and activity of the papacy in the State, with possibly something of the imitative papacy, in addition. In connection the Synod commends the efforts of the American and Foreign Christian Union.

Colportage by the American Tract Society is repeatedly commended from 1844 and onward.

An overture on "attitude in prayer" was offered in 1834, but was summarily laid on the table. Some will remember that this was the

time when the change reversing the old custom of standing in prayer and sitting in song was taking place in the churches.

This list of topics considered might be, of course, greatly extended; but these are mentioned to show the drift of matters in the religious mind of the State and of the country in the earlier period of our history. For such were living questions of the time.

It is less necessary to notice the later action of the body in any detail, since later matters have less of historic interest, and are more within the memory of the present generation.

But one important matter deserves some further consideration, being an experience in the early life of the body, and giving something of shape to customs and phases of thinking still among us; I allude to

THE PLAN OF UNION.

This was an arrangement between the Congregationalists of Connecticut and the General Assembly, entered into in 1801, to prevent the rivalry natural between the two denominations, so nearly alike in faith and mode of worship, in their migration and settlement in the western country. The aim of it was eminently Christian, and for a period of about 40 years, it seemed to work well. A great number of churches were formed in accordance with it in Western New York, Ohio and Michigan. That is, they were partly Presbyterian and partly Congregational.

The Synod of Michigan was formed in it, and its features often appear in our account thus far. Its Missionary Instruments, the American Board, the Home Missionary and Education Societies, and their propagating agents, we have had a glimpse of.

But there were two parties which did not like the Plan. One was, the distinctive Presbyterians, too far south to be mixed with the New England people. The other was the out and out Congregationalists, who disliked it as soon as they fairly comprehended its workings. Too many of the western churches, though consisting of New England people, became Presbyterian. The reason is plain. Congregationalism is a system of usages; and the young emigrants, with their young ministers, were not much acquainted with these usages and were too far separated from their older brethren to be easily informed. But the Presbyterian *Book* was always at hand, and was a ready guide for proceedings

anywhere. The effect was more and more seen, as churches came into being westward.

And the question of slavery, increasingly agitated, as time went on, was not only a theme of bitterness itself, but it stirred the elements of disagreement in other things.

For a short time the disruption of the Presbyterian Church seemed to strengthen the Plan of Union; stimulating efforts for harmony between its partners. Hence in our Synod, we find the Plan of Union, in 1837, anew explained and sustained by resolution; and the right of the General Assembly to annul it, is denied. The excising acts are also condemned, and sympathy expressed with the excised Synods. The charge of heresy had been made against the Synod, by some one in the Assembly, which was formally denied, and with some resentment. A committee was also raised in 1839, to produce a "Declaration of Sentiments," for the adoption of the Body, in answer to all such charges. Long Pastoral Letters were also uttered from year to year. The Catechism is commended to study; and a committee is appointed to secure a Depository of the Confession of Faith, for distribution among the churches; all as if in refutation of charges, and current suspicions.

Other symptoms of uneasiness make their appearance. Judicial trials are frequent; conferences are had with the General Association, as if all were not entirely serene in that quarter. The American Home Missionary Society and the Education Society are anew commended to confidence. One might wonder, without some recollection of the times, why they should need such commendation, seeing they had been so long in use.

In 1837 a committee was raised to see if more efficient and economical agencies of benevolence cannot be devised. This, it is true, may have been the result of complaint against agents thus early made, but is probably the effect, in good measure, of the financial stringency of the times, which was already operating with distressing force in all the new settlements of the west.

Ministers are complained of in 1841, that they withdraw from one body to join another without dismissal; also that church members change their relations without leave.

In 1842 the Synod declares itself satisfied with the standards of the church, and dismissed the matter of Declaration of Sentiments

The symptoms of friction, beginning in 1837, increase but slowly at first, but become more distinct by 1846. In 1845 the General Association expressed a desire that the Plan of Union might be modified; to which in a long and labored report, the Synod replied, traversing the whole case, and affirming its adhesion to the Plan as it was.

But in 1846 a convention was had at Michigan City, Indiana, where the Congregational partners unmistakably signified their dissatisfaction; and from that date the wiser heads on either side began to cast about for separate interests. And it is not very long before the Plan is visibly moribund. The New York *Independent* was started in 1846, or a little before, for the express purpose of teaching and vindicating pure Congregationalism, and bringing about an entire separation of the two denominations, and its influence was soon visible in the western churches.

There was a joint organ, on an inadequate financial basis, published at Chicago, started as the *Western Herald*, but changing its name, established in 1846, and which held for the union till 1853, when it succumbed by the division of the two churches, and went into the hands of the Congregationalists.

Our Synod found itself in these times in an uncomfortable position. It was the habit of the times with the Abolitionists to criticise the Assembly as sympathetic with slavery, or too slow in condemning it; for to it were still attached members in Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi and Missouri. At the same time the Congregationalists were digging at the foundation of the arrangement on which the Synod rested. Its action, therefore, seems to face sometimes one way and sometimes the other in repelling attack from either quarter.

In 1846 it condemns the Assembly for adjourning to meet the next year. For, as a concession to its Congregational element, the Assembly had adopted the plan of triennial meetings, which the Synod deemed violated by such adjournment. The triennial system hung on after a fashion, at least theoretically, till 1850, when the Assembly met at Detroit. This meeting was the turning point in the life of the N. S. Presbyterian Church. Henceforth the tri-ennial system was openly abandoned.

It was at this session, too, that slaveholding by Church members

was pronounced an "offense": which proved to be such an offense to the Southern part of it that not long after it left the N. S. body.

From this time the resolve was made, with Presbyterians, that instead of trying longer to be two things at once, we would be one thing, and that one Presbyterian. Of course there was reluctance in coming into this arrangement, and giving up the habits of years. But God's providence was stronger than man's reluctance. The ecclesiastical satchet had worn so well, so long, that some were slow to think it would not continue to last. But it was decided at length that it was not good for *permanent wear*. The all wool was better.

Hence we find now starting up various ecclesiastical organisms, with Presbyterian features, which our body recognises. The American Home Missionary Society gradually becomes unsatisfactory. It is charged with working in the interest of Congregationalism. Its "Rules," of which it had a good many, forbade the aid of churches in cities, other than such as were foreign, or colored. And in the cities and larger towns, Presbyterianism looked for much of its growth. Consequently, at St. Louis, 1855, the "Church Extension" committee was inaugurated in the Assembly, to supplement the work of the Home Missionary Society, where it failed of giving satisfaction to its Presbyterian constituents.

A Loan Fund of \$100,000 for purposes of Church Erection in the Western Synods was also gathered, which grew at length into our Church Erection Board, as the Church Extension Scheme became afterward the N. S. Board of Home Missions. Into these schemes the Synod entered, and undertook to raise \$1,500 as its share of the Church Erection fund. And in the year 1858 there are fifteen applications for its aid in building churches in Michigan.

Still, Societies and Agents are not abandoned. In 1859, its list of Societies is given as follows: The American Board, the Home Mission Society, the American and Foreign Christian Union, the Western Seaman's Friend Society, and the American Sunday School Union.

But an Exploring Missionary is called for, and a recognition of the Assembly's Permanent Committees and Boards, gradually follows. Church Extension, Church Erection, and the Assembly's scheme for Ministerial Education are recognized in 1856. Publication is accepted

in 1858; and the next year collections for it are reported. There follow, in 1864, Freedmen's Aid and Ministerial Relief.

The same year the proposition for the re-union of the Presbyterian Church is approved by the Synod, and it takes place in 1870. This re-union severed the last link of the Plan of Union, carrying with it, the proposition for a division of the Missions of the Board, and the separate working of the two churches henceforth in the Foreign Field. This division was accomplished in entire friendship, and with no loss of that Christian confidence which had held them together so long in the great work of the world's conversion. Their missions are now side by side, over the world's surface, in harmonious recognition, and in common labors. The division of the two churches, on the Home Field, had taken place from 1860 to 1863; the union dying by piecemeal, and not without irritation.

I have, properly, not a moment for comment upon the value and results of this Plan of Union, in whose atmosphere the Synod of Michigan was born, and which it breathed for some twenty five years.

The Plan had its uses. God's Providence and Spirit owned and used it for certain ends; and when these were accomplished, it ceased to live.

For one thing, it brought into the Presbyterian Church, a new element, which I, being of Yankee origin, must think to be of some value. It infused a little of New England into European Presbyterianism, which served as a leaven of change in state church rigidity. It gave an impulse to Foreign Missionary work, which will never be lost. The American Board, it will be remembered, was organized in 1810. Our Foreign Board was not organized til 1837. Nor can we think that our Board suffers, to say the least, from the help it gets from its Yankee element, even now.

And Scotch Presbyterianism has been of some value to that part of the church, whose antecedents are Congregational. Its stanchness, steadiness and adherence to the standards, have not been lost upon it.

And Michigan, I must think, has gained, in giving some of us a contented home, where we can work, a little more to our satisfaction, than anywhere else, and not the less, that we as a body are of a different origin.

And the church at large has learned the wisdom of that Mosaic statute which forbade the yoking together of animals of different make and nature. Otherwise that an amalgamation of irreconcilable systems is not easy of accomplishment, nor a permanent union of systems of different genius, a wise attempt. Denominations are the product of God's Spirit and providence, and needful in the present condition of things. This does not imply that so many *fractions* are called for, for every good thing is abused. But we are not done with the larger denominations yet; and when God sees them no longer needed we need not fear but that he will dispose of divisions with the same facility as they were created.

Why should Israel be kept separated into twelve tribes were not important ends to be met in the arrangement?

We thus see the changes that have gone over us, both of questions and of men. The things that plagued the fathers most are gone—slavery, the Plan of Union with its difficult balances, and the various *isms* to which the time gave birth. Would that their prayers for the end of intemperance and Sabbath desecration were as fully answered.

A generation of men have passed off the stage and the course of another is well advanced. The places that know some of us will soon know us no more.

But God's work has advanced and is extending. Since the Synod met in 1834 the gospel has girdled the globe, and Michigan has sons and daughters, antipodes to us, at work for Christ. The wilderness they entered as pioneers is now blossoming. The impulse they gave, can we not accelerate? The work they left us, growing as it is, is it not a joy to do? And shall we not, with like faith, continue it till our call come? We have been looking backward awhile. Let us now look forward.

1771

