

# THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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## I.

### ENGLISH THEISTIC THOUGHT AT THE CLOSE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

IN the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* Prof. Flint expresses the opinion in his article on "Theism" that far more labor had been expended on the theistic proofs during the twenty years immediately preceding (1865–1885) than during the entire previous part of the century. No one will question the truth of this assertion, nor, we suppose, of the one we venture to add—that theism has received far more attention since that statement was published than it did during the two decades referred to.

Several reasons may be assigned for this revival of interest in theistic questions. Philosophy, which has so often recognized a community of interest with theism in fundamental problems, seems disposed to-day to acknowledge this more than ever, and to admit to the area of discussion on equal terms with other proposed solutions the theistic theory of the universe with its bearing on such ultimate questions as those of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and æsthetics. So that Principal Fairbairn may say with little fear of contradiction that "Theism may with equal truth be described as either the last chapter of a philosophy or the first of a theology. Its methods, principles, formulæ, arguments are all philosophical; the systems it criticises are the philosophies; the authorities it invokes are philosophers."\* It is but a step in the same direction when the Philosophy of Religion with its discussion as to the truth of theism is made by some writers—*e.g.*, Ladd, Külpe and Wundt†—a branch of philosophy, and coördinated

\* *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 402.

† Ladd, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 176; Külpe, *Introduction to Philosophy*, Eng. trans., pp. 20, 90–95; Wundt, *System der Philosophie*, S. 35, 642–654.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES.

FROM May 16 to 25 the sessions of the Forty-first General Assembly of this Church were held in Little Rock, Ark. Twenty-eight years before the Assembly met in this beautiful Western city, and had left memories fragrant with affection for many godly men who have since entered into rest. The sessions this year were held in the same building, the First Church, of which Dr. Welch was for many years minister, and of which Rev. S. G. Miller is now pastor. The hospitality of the people was unbounded, and all the arrangements for the comfort and efficiency of the work of the Assembly were excellent. Altogether it was a delightful meeting.

The retiring Moderator was Judge J. W. Martin, a ruling elder in the Church where the Assembly met. He asked the Rev. Neander M. Woods, D.D., of Memphis, Tenn., to preach the opening sermon. His theme was "The Sense of Sin," and it was a solemn and fitting message for the present day. In a very handsome way the Assembly made Dr. Woods Moderator by a unanimous vote. He made an excellent presiding officer, combining courtesy and firmness in a very pleasant way.

There are thirteen Synods and nearly eighty Presbyteries within the bounds of the Assembly, and there were almost 200 Commissioners present at this meeting, representing about 230,000 members. Among them the older, the younger and the middle-aged were well represented. Some very able ruling elders were present, and rendered useful service to the Assembly.

A great many overtures were received and disposed of. The reports of the various Executive Committees of the Church were presented, and showed good progress during the year. These Committees are as follows: Home Missions, with office at Atlanta, Ga.; Foreign Missions, Nashville, Tenn.; Publication and Sabbath-schools, Richmond, Va.; Education for the Ministry, Memphis, Tenn.; and Colored Evangelization, Tuscaloosa, Ala. The Invalid Fund till now has been connected with the Home Mission Committee. In almost every respect the reports of these Committees were cheering and showed progress.

The subject of Home Missions engaged the attention of the Assembly for some time. At present the Church has a rather complex system. The work is conducted partly by the Presbyteries, partly by the Synods and partly by the General Assembly. The last is conducted chiefly in the newer and weaker Synods. It is felt by some that there is need of a simpler plan, and a Committee was appointed to consider the whole subject and report to the next Assembly. There is Home Mission work in every Synod, and the question of a vigorous and unified policy is one of much importance. A new Secretary had to be elected to take the

place of the late Rev. J. N. Craig, D.D., who had served faithfully for many years. The choice after many ballots fell on Rev. S. L. Morris, D.D., of Macon, Ga., who accepts the position with the promise of much usefulness.

Foreign Mission work prospered during the year. In China there was some interruption with work, owing to the troubles there, but the lives of no missionaries were lost and very little property was destroyed. The fields of the Church happily were not in the most turbulent region, and so there was less suffering and loss. The Congo boat—the “R. L. Lapsley”—costing about \$12,000 and built by the gifts of the Sabbath-schools, has been launched on the upper waters of this great river, for the service of the Congo Mission. It will be of great value. The contributions this year exceeded those of any year hitherto to this cause, and the staff of missionaries is larger than ever. The Secretary, Dr. Chester, was sent on a special mission to Brazil, and is now on his journey.

The report of a Special Committee on Ecclesiastical Commissions took some time, and a minority report was adopted, defining their nature and function more clearly, so as to distinguish them from an ordinary Committee and from an Executive Committee. This will prove a very useful piece of legislation.

The new Hymnal which has been in preparation is now completed, will soon be published, and is commended to all the people as the authorized book of praise. A very extensive and useful report from an *ad interim* Committee was presented by Dr. Rice on the work of colored evangelization, as carried on by the different Churches. The work of the Southern Church shows advance in this important field, but it is still far from what it ought to be. Stillman Institute, Tuscaloosa, Ala., is gaining strength and doing good work in training colored ministers.

More attention than usual was devoted to Sabbath-school and Young People's Society work. The Executive Committee was authorized to engage a permanent Secretary, and since the Assembly adjourned Rev. Dr. A. L. Phillips, of Nashville, Tenn., has been selected for this position. The Committee of Publication has had a good year in its work. Steps were taken to push this work a great deal more vigorously.

The report of the Committee on Education for the Ministry made a good financial showing, having a good balance in the treasury, but the decline in the number of candidates for the ministry was marked, and gave the Assembly not a little concern. Action was taken with a view to have the conditions set before all the churches. The interests of the Bible Society were brought before the Assembly by Dr. T. H. Law, and the report of the Permanent Committee on the Sabbath sounded a needed note of warning in regard to the increase of Sabbath violation in the country.

The Twentieth Century Movement to raise \$1,000,000 for education was brought before the Assembly, and Rev. Prof. R. C. Reed, D.D.,

of Columbia, S. C., was made Chairman of the Committee having charge of this movement.

Three important questions occupied the earnest attention of the Assembly for some time. The first was the Invalid Fund. Two years ago the Assembly appointed an *ad interim* Committee to consider this subject and report to the next Assembly. That Assembly a year ago received a long report from that Committee, adopted certain resolutions, and directed the Committee to bring in a scheme to this Assembly. This was done and the new and well-organized scheme was adopted unanimously by the Assembly. It provides for the organization of a separate Executive Committee to be known as "Ministerial Relief," and establishes its headquarters at Richmond, Va., with Dr. Russell Cecil at its Chairman. Several active business men deeply interested in the scheme are on this Committee. For many years this branch of Church service had been connected with the Home Mission Committee, and it was but poorly supported. It has now its proper place given to it in the Church, and no doubt better results will follow. The details of the scheme cannot be noted here, but they are quite complete and were heartily approved.

A second subject which occupied part of three days in the Assembly was the question of the consolidation of Danville Seminary, North, and Louisville Seminary, South, at Louisville. Along with this the consolidation of Central University, South, and Center College, North, at Danville, also came up, although the Assembly had no voice in the question of the union of the colleges. The Assembly was asked to give its assent to the terms of consolidation, which were very carefully drawn up so as to safeguard the rights of both sides and the interests of truth as well. There is to be joint ownership in the new institution and equal control, as each side will have the same number of members on the joint Board. The teaching, too, is always to be on the basis of the Standards that are common to both Churches, so that unless both revise the Standards the teaching must not be modified. The property, too, is tied up to the Standards that are now common to both Churches, and the Assembly has veto power over both Directors and Professors. These terms had already been approved by the Boards of the respective institutions, by the Synods of Kentucky and Missouri, South, and the Synod of Kentucky, North, and among the people generally in these bounds there was scarcely any opposition and much warm approval.

It was opposed, however, on the floor of the Assembly, and there was a vigorous debate upon the subject. The main reasonings against it were: That it would lead to friction, that it was inconsistent with the historic position and principles of the Church, South, and that it would lead to organic union with the Church, North. In urging these objections the speakers covered a wide range and raised many questions which had only a very remote bearing on the question at issue. Many thought

that it was a pity to have the discussion cast along the lines that the objectors marked out.

Those who argued in favor of the plan urged that the dangers were greatly magnified by the opponents, that the plan was not inconsistent with the constitution and history of the Church, and that, so far as Kentucky and Missouri are concerned, it did not mean organic union. In addition, the advocates of the consolidation of these two seminaries explained at length the situation in Kentucky, showed the kindred type of Presbyterianism represented by both sides in this Synod, and laid stress upon the fact that much gain would come to the cause of Presbyterianism in Kentucky and Missouri from the proposed consolidation of the colleges and seminaries within their own bounds. The result was that assent was given, leaving the responsibility with the Synods, by a vote of 120 to 56. This places the new joint seminary in precisely the same relation to the Assembly as the other seminaries of the Church, which are all under Synodical control and have only general supervision at the hands of the General Assembly. The details of this important measure will soon be fully matured, and next session will find the whole college work conducted at Danville, and the entire seminary work located at Louisville. Those who are on the ground here, and who in many cases on both sides were actors in the divisions of over thirty years ago, are satisfied that the right thing has been done, and are persuaded that great and lasting good will surely follow what has been effected in this important matter.

The third matter of special interest was some proposals to amend the Confession of Faith in regard to its statements about infant salvation, as well as to rescind the order of last Assembly to insert an answer to an overture at that Assembly upon the subject of infant salvation as a footnote in the Confession. This year a Special Committee considered the whole subject with much care and made the following report: "That no action be taken, for the following reasons: 1. It is unwise to initiate at this time the agitation of this question among our people. 2. No modification that does not eliminate Scriptural Calvinism from this section of the Confession will obviate the objection, which comes from Arminian sources. 3. The Westminster Confession of Faith is the first great creed which taught the salvation of infants dying in infancy on truly Scriptural grounds. 4. The Confession of Faith in this section (x. 3) does not teach the damnation of any infants dying in infancy, for the reason that the contrast made in it is not between elect and non-elect infants dying in infancy, but between elect persons who die in infancy and elect persons who do not die in infancy. 5. While we have a well-grounded hope, founded in Scripture, that all infants dying in infancy are saved, yet the Confession of Faith goes as far as the Scriptures justify a positive creed statement upon the subject."

The next meeting was appointed for Jackson, Miss., and at noon on Saturday, the tenth day of sitting, the last words of the first Assembly

of the century were spoken, and its deliberations ended with much of hope and cheer for the future.

LOUISVILLE, KY.

FRANCIS R. BEATTIE.

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.

THE Assembly met at Ottawa, the capital of the Dominion, from the 12th to the 20th of June. The attendance of ministers and ruling elders was unusually large, very few of those appointed Commissioners being absent. The arrangements by the local Committee of citizens for the convenience and comfort of members were highly satisfactory. The Rev. Dr. R. H. Warden, General Agent and Treasurer of the Church, was unanimously elected Moderator, and proved a thoroughly efficient presiding officer. He ruled promptly and so successfully that no appeal from his decisions was taken from first to last, and no time was wasted by irrelevant discussions.

The spirit of the Assembly was decidedly independent, vigorous and progressive, not disposed to yield tacitly to the leadership of any one man or set of men. There was a healthy determination to be governed by facts in every instance, and to conclude in the direction of what seemed in the best interests of the Church and country. Onlookers were impressed by the dignity, decorum and brotherly Christian feeling which uniformly prevailed. There were no burning issues, heresies or great constitutional questions to be disposed of. Creed revision is not yet to the front in Canada. And since the adoption of a few explanatory notes in connection with the Unions of 1861 and 1875, no formal action in this direction has been proposed in the subordinate courts or General Assembly. The bulk of the people seem, in the meantime, satisfied with the doctrines of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, the private study of which, however, it is to be feared, receives less prominence than in the past. Some think that portions of these venerable symbols might readily be expressed in terms better fitted to convey substantially all the Biblical truth they contain, and to remove occasion for misunderstandings and antagonism. They urge, what all must concede, that our subordinate Standards are not exhaustive of the teaching of Scripture or of the best results that consecrated scholarship can produce, and that certain fundamental matters touching the practical activity of the Church of to-day are entirely omitted or insufficiently emphasized.

There are a few among the wealthier and more prosperous classes of the people from whom, now and then, we hear inarticulate murmurs in favor of a more elaborate and ornate religious cult, but the vast majority of our ministers and elders are too earnest and busy in pushing forward congregational and missionary work to pay attention to them. The fact that spiritual vigor and growth have been experienced in a large meas-