

## ARTICLE IV.

## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1862.

[by the Rev. Joseph R. Wilson, D.D., Augusta, Ga.]

## PLACE OF MEETING.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America convened in the city of Montgomery, Alabama, on the first day of May, 1862, in the elegant Presbyterian church of which the Rev. Dr. Petrie is the pastor. The regularly appointed place for the meeting of this Assembly was Memphis, Tennessee; but the presence of hostile armies, on the eve of battle, near that city, the difficulties and hazards necessarily existing to prevent its hospitable homes from being reached by the ordinary channels of travel, and the preoccupation of the minds of its citizens by the demands of their own private affairs or by the wants of the numerous sick soldiers thrown upon their sympathies, rendered it altogether inexpedient to attempt a meeting there. Accordingly, the Moderator of the last Assembly notified the Presbyteries of the propriety of a change of place, and requested them to appoint their Commissioners in view of a meeting at Montgomery. The Clerks were desired to issue their proclamation, directing the Assembly to meet in accordance with this change. There was a universal acquiescence in the wisdom of the alteration; and a precedent was thus, we presume, established for the future government of the officers of the Assembly when placed in similar circumstances.

## ORGANIZATION.

The Rev. Dr. B. M. Palmer, the Moderator of the last Assembly, was unable to be present, greatly to the disappointment of the Commissioners and the citizens of Montgomery. He had reached Mobile, on his way to the Assem-

bly; but the startling intelligence of the fall of New Orleans overtook him there; and he felt it to be his duty to retrace his steps immediately, that he might place himself in the ranks of the defenders of his country at a point where the most effective blows might be directed against the invaders of his home. In his absence, the Rev. J. L. KIRKPATRICK, D. D., was unanimously chosen to preach the opening sermon, and to preside until the new organization should be effected. His admirable discourse, and his dignified presidency during the period required for the usual opening formalities, pointed him out as the fitting Moderator of the Assembly, to which honorable office he was accordingly elected, without the opposition of a second nomination. The Rev. T. L. MCBRYDE, D. D., was unanimously chosen Temporary Clerk.

It ought to be added, in connexion with this, that there was another absence deeply regretted: that of the Stated Clerk, the Rev. Dr. JOHN N. WADDEL, who was detained at home by the exigencies of the war. The Rev. E. T. BAIRD, D. D., was elected to act in his stead during the sessions of this Assembly.

#### THE ATTENDANCE, ETC.

As was to have been expected, the number of Commissioners in attendance was small. The occupancy of the line of the Mississippi river by the enemy, rendered it unadvisable for the Arkansas brethren to attempt to be present. There was but *one* delegate from Texas, who, a chaplain in the Army of the West, was providentially enabled to attend, on his way to join his regiment. There were but *two* from the Synod of Memphis: the seat of active war lying between their homes and Montgomery. From the Synod of Mississippi there were *three*: one of whom was the Secretary of Domestic Missions, who had made his escape from New Orleans a few days before the enemy took possession. The other Synods were well represented by ministerial Commis-

sioners; the blanks in the roll being chiefly in the column of ruling elders. In all there were thirty-one ministers and sixteen ruling elders, making an humble total of forty-seven : this being considerably less than half of the whole number who had been elected to attend. These faithful brethren, however, constituted a highly respectable representation of the Church, and entered upon the discharge of their duties with godly seriousness, and under a deep feeling of peculiar responsibility. The general determination was, to transact the business with prompt straightforwardness, and with a minimum amount of speech-making. There was also manifested a purpose to dispose only of the indispensable routine of subjects which necessarily occupied the docket, and to suffer the introduction of as little new matter as possible; leaving the greater matters of Church policy for future Assemblies, to be more numerously attended in more peaceful times. Such a proof of wisdom ought to entitle this body to a place in the succession under the qualification of the “prudent” Assembly.

#### COMMITTEES CONTINUED.

It will be seen, in the published Minutes, that several important committees, appointed at the Augusta Assembly, were continued. Such was the Committee on the Revision of the Form of Government and Book of Discipline; it having appeared that, owing to the disturbed condition of the country, and for other less potent causes, the chairman (Dr. Thornwell) had been unable to convene its scattered members at any time during the four months which intervened between the meetings of the two Assemblies. It is certainly to be hoped that this highly important committee will be enabled to meet at an early day, to fix upon such propositions of revision as they may deem wisest, and publish the result of their labors for the benefit of the several Presbyteries, in which courts the whole subject ought to be discussed, not later than next spring. Thus may we be

able to secure final action, at no distant day, touching matters which are both vital and difficult of settling. We do not plead for haste, indeed, but for promptitude. And, doubtless, the distinguished chairman and all the members of this long-standing committee, will soon be in a situation to satisfy the expectations of the Church, by taking definite action on all the points of change at issue. Many of these points, we may remind our readers, have already been elaborately discussed, in the pages of this Review and elsewhere. But we need to have a fuller, or at least a more general, discussion of them all in our lower church judicatories, for the benefit of numbers of church officers, who have as yet paid but little attention to the subject.

The committee to prepare a pastoral letter on the "Religious Instruction of the Colored People" was also continued. It is to be regretted that there was a necessity for this. There are many powerful reasons why the action of this committee ought not to be long postponed. Now that the churches are generally awaking to a profound feeling of the importance of a trust committed anew to their fidelity by the separation of the slave States from the free; now that the providence of God is distinctly calling upon all our people to do their utmost in behalf of the spiritual improvement of millions of dependents in their own homes, who have been rudely cast off from the intelligent sympathies of all the world besides; now that it is to be demonstrated that the institution of slavery, as understood and cherished in the Southern Confederacy, is open to objection only on the ground of certain abuses, all of which can be softened or entirely removed by allowing Christianity to have full sway in its development and management: now, especially, it seems to us, should the minds of God's children in this country be authoritatively instructed with reference to duty in these important premises. We would, therefore, have been delighted to see the letter, which the aforementioned committee was directed to

prepare, placed at once before the Church and the world, that the mighty work whose prosecution it is intended to enforce, might be entered upon with all the light which Scripture and conscience, which considerations of patriotism, humanity, and necessity, can throw upon this prominent path of Christian enterprise. We are, however, aware of the difficulties that stood in the way of the committee, and which, during the last four distracting months, rendered the proper discharge of their duty almost impossible. We trust that the delay will prove a blessing in the end, by securing a more thorough investigation and a more complete presentation of the whole subject, on the part of the committee, which will now have abundant time to mature a historical paper upon a theme that may well burden the most gifted minds and tax the most ready pen. Besides, the timely publication of the eminently faithful and judicious address of the Rev. Dr. C. C. Jones, in our various religious newspapers, has contributed largely to fill up a gap which the report yet to be made will, we hope, completely remove.

Whilst speaking of the continuation of committees, it is germane to say a word with respect to those committees of the first Assembly which were directed to procure charters for the trustees of this body from certain of our State legislatures. It was hardly to be expected that the gentlemen charged with this duty would be able to make satisfactory reports touching a matter which is placed out of their control, in great part, by the necessary delays of legislation. But it would, doubtless, have been highly gratifying to the Assembly, if they had found it convenient to communicate some information on the subject. They might have reported, at least, what they found they could not do, and what they had reason to believe would be the final result of their applications for charters under the laws of the States respectively solicited. An informal note (privately directed) was, indeed, read to the Assembly, whose brief contents stated simply the fact that the Legislature of

Virginia had rejected the application to pass the bill adopted at Augusta. None of the reasons which governed this rejection were given. It was also incidentally communicated that the bill in question had been passed by the Legislature of Tennessee; but of this there was no reliable assurance. We do think that this neglect on the part of these committees, (although partially excusable in view of those circumstances of the country which drew off their attention as citizens to national affairs,) is to be lamented, we had almost said reprehended. It compelled the Assembly to take new action. Feeling the importance of the subject, it was deemed necessary to raise another committee, to whom was referred the entire matter, as stated in the following resolution :

Resolved, That a committee of five be appointed, - whose duty it shall be to secure all necessary information as to the forms of charters, and the conditions of securing them in the several States where they may be required, and report the same to the next General Assembly; and also that the committees appointed by the last Assembly be requested to report the result of their efforts to this committee.

Pending the passage of this resolution, a discussion arose, led by the Rev. Dr. Baird, (chairman of this new committee of five,) whose remarks showed great familiarity with the subject of charters, and who took occasion to characterize as absurd the bill which the last Assembly had prepared with so much care, and finished with the hand of so much legal learning. It would seem to be a pity that Dr. Baird had not been present at Augusta last December, to have added the light of his knowledge to that of Chancellor Johnstone, Judge Shepherd, and a galaxy of forensic stars besides. As it is, however, it is evident that this subject of charters will have to be discussed on the floor of the next Assembly; for the new committee will doubtless feel itself authorized to bring another form of bill, charged with important modifications of the present one. The vital point in the existing bill has reference to the attempt

therein made (we think successfully) to combine in one great corporate body the various agencies of the Church, so that there will be a strict unity in the practice, as well as the theory, of our ecclesiastical government. And if this central idea of the charter must be abandoned, according to the desires of some, other reforms will be necessarily made, which must seriously alter the character of our "Executive Committees," and lead to their being remodelled, somewhat according to the pattern of the old and offensive "Boards."

#### REPORTS OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES.

A large portion of the time which the Assembly allowed itself for deliberation was occupied in listening to, discussing, and approving the reports on Foreign Missions and Domestic Missions : these being the only two reports which were presented from the Executive Committees. That on Publication was received by the Permanent Clerk in time to be embodied with the other valuable matter of the Appendix; and that on Education, although ready for the Assembly, was, by no fault of any one, never sent to that body. The respected Secretaries, the Rev. Dr. William Brown and the Rev. Dr. John H. Gray, were both prevented from attending the sessions at Montgomery, greatly to the regret of all concerned. The Assembly enjoyed, however, the presence of the Rev. Dr. J. Leighton Wilson, Secretary of Foreign Missions, and of the Rev. Dr. John Leyburn, Secretary of Domestic Missions, the former in his official character only, the latter as a member as well. The reports which these two brethren presented richly deserved the close attention given to them by the Assembly, and will far more than repay a careful perusal on the part of members of the Church. It is unfortunate, speaking from a worldly point of view, that our Foreign Missionary field has been shut off from the Committee by the enemy who is ravaging the banks of the Mississippi. But

it may turn out for the best. Meanwhile, the Committee is resolved to strain every effort to fulfil the Church's mission in the promising field so lately flourishing with all the evidences of Divine favor. The Missionaries among the Indians are not likely to suffer, if human energy, directed by the grace of God, can prevent it. They are already supplied for several months to come. As to Domestic Missions, the Executive Committee appointed by the Assembly is quite broken up by the fall of New Orleans into the hands of our wicked foe; the Secretary is a refugee in Athens, Georgia; and his ad interim advisers consist of the brethren in the ministry and in the eldership immediately about him. Dr. Leyburn is not the man to suffer this great cause to languish, if industry, zeal, and experience, can prevent.

#### OTHER DOCUMENTS OF THE ASSEMBLY.

A capital review of the state of the Church is to be found in the Narrative, prepared with remarkable care by the Rev. Mr. Girardeau, of Charleston. The Assembly wisely ordered it to be read to the churches from our various pulpits. Both the Narrative of last year, written by the venerable Dr. Leland, and that of this, are fair specimens of what such public papers ought to be: well worded, chaste, fervent, instructive, discriminating.

The reports of the different Standing Committees present nothing requiring special remark. That on Systematic Benevolence, written by the Rev. A. A. Porter, of Columbia, is deserving of attention, as presenting a condensed view of a subject whose importance can not be overrated, lying, as it does, at the foundation of all our benevolent enterprises.

The letter of Dr. Leyburn, written by him as chairman of the Committee on Bills and Overtures, addressed to the President of the Confederate States, contains a straightforward, manly plea in defence of the Sabbath against the

incursions of godless army regulations. It will not do much good, however; inasmuch as statesmen, even the wisest of them, have yet to learn that to govern a country successfully requires obedience on the part of the governing powers themselves to the plain laws of Heaven. They act as if politics were wholly independent of, if not wholly above, religion. History is full of this error, especially as it relates to Christian countries; for the heathen have always maintained a controlling regard for the commands of their gods in all their laws and institutions.

A highly interesting "Pastoral Letter" was prepared by the Rev. Dr. Baird, chairman of a special committee, appointed for this purpose. It is addressed "To the Ministers and Members of our Churches, and Young Men of our Congregations, in the Confederate Army." It was ordered to be printed in the Appendix to the Minutes, and to be published in tract form by the Executive Committee of Publication. It must be useful; although we think that its utility would have been enhanced if the author had submitted it to a greater pressure of condensation. We hope that the Lord will bless it to those for whom it is intended!

We are pleased to see that the Assembly did not think that it went out of its way in recommending the Bible Society of the Confederate States to "the favor and patronage of our churches and people." This Society, located in Augusta, Georgia, is now energetically engaged in publishing, from stereotype plates, a large edition of the New Testament, and of the New Testament and Psalms, specially adapted to the use of soldiers. It can not want for patronage, for it is eminently deserving of it. As soon as the blockade shall have been removed, it will import largely from England such editions of the Bible and Testament as will fully meet the wants of all classes of our population.

The Assembly adjourned after a session of only four days. It did its work well, and left undone much that it felt itself unauthorized to attempt.