

THE REVISED BOOK OF ORDER.

The Rev. Dr. George D. Armstrong moved that a committee *be* appointed to take charge of all the papers coining up from Presbyteries touching the Revised Book. Dr. Adger enquired whether the proposition was simply a committee to report to the Assembly what the returns might be from the Presbyteries, or to take the whole matter in hand and mature action on the subject for the Assembly's adoption. It was explained that the latter was the object proposed, and the Assembly voted to have such a committee! George D. Armstrong, John B. Adger, A. Cowan, J. R. King, W. H. Davis, T. W. Erwin, and R. R. Houston, Ministers, and S. P. Greves, James Carson, T. Frierson, and R. L. Beall, Ruling Elders, were appointed. Dr. Armstrong, the chairman, it was, as the reader may remember, who rendered such eminent service to the cause of revision in that curious debate at the Richmond Assembly. He seems to have attended the Assembly at New Orleans, having in view, as his one great end, to help forward the revision. It was a very arduous work which was imposed on him by his chairmanship of this Committee, to collate and digest all the Presbyterial reports, but he went through it **skilfully**, and also successfully carried through the Assembly all that his Committee reported to that body. Let those who love our Doctrine and Order, as they stand associated in vital relations, see that to Dr. Armstrong there shall be erected for this service done the Church *monumentum ære perennius*.

On the seventh day of the sessions. Dr. Armstrong read the report of his Committee. Answers had been received, either official or through the commissioners present, from all our sixty-three Presbyteries except Indian, Central Ohio and Sao Paulo. These answers were to be classified thus: Twenty-five Presbyteries have adopted the Revised Book as it now stands, and thirty-five have not adopted it, but twenty of these express approval in the main, and ask that the revision may go on. Two Presbyteries wish the work of revision to be stopped. The Presbyteries are therefore overwhelmingly in favor of prosecuting the work, and that on the basis of the present Revised Book. Two plans

of doing this have been suggested by Presbyteries: The one to commit the work to a convention to perfect a book on the basis of the present revision, which should be sent down to the Presbyteries for adoption or rejection before the next Assembly ; the other, to carry on the work under the auspices of the Assembly, as follows: (1) That certain articles in the Revised Book, on which there is a difference of opinion in the Church, be submitted to a separate vote in the Presbyteries; (2) that certain amendments in the revision desired by the Presbyteries be acted upon by this Assembly, and the Book, thus amended, be sent down to the Presbyteries for their adoption or rejection. The latter plan was recommended by the Committee, chiefly on the ground that outside the six or seven points to be submitted to the separate vote, there is very little difference of opinion in the Church. Nine-tenths of the amendments suggested by the Presbyteries are mere verbal changes, affecting only the style. The *first recommendation* of the Committee, therefore, was that the Assembly consider seven articles to be submitted to a separate vote in the Presbyteries. The *second recommendation* was to consider eleven amendments of the Revised Form, and thirteen amendments of the Revised Discipline proposed by Presbyteries. And the *third recommendation* was that this Assembly should remit the whole work of amending and polishing the style and language of the Book to the next Assembly, which shall appoint a committee for this purpose, to whom shall be referred all the criticisms sent up by the Presbyteries, and who shall revise it, but make no alteration affecting the sense, and who shall have it printed.

The Committee's *recommendations* were then taken up in their order: *first*, the seven articles to be submitted for a separate vote. They were as follows:

1. The restriction of a right to vote in Presbytery. (Revised Form, Chap. V., Section 4, Art. II.)
2. The whole matter of Ecclesiastical Commissions. (Ditto. Chap. V., Section 7.)
3. The question of voters in the election of a pastor. (Ditto, Chap. VI., Section 3, Art. IV.)

4. The examination rule. (Ditto, Chap. V., Section 4, Art. V.)
5. The case of an offence voluntarily confessed. (Revised Discipline, Chap. XII., Art. I.)
6. The transfer of the unregenerate communicant. (Ditto. Art. II.)
7. The demission of the ministry. (Ditto. Art. III.)

Gen. W. L. T. Prince, ruling elder from Mecklenburg Presbytery, thought there should be sent down, as an eighth article, the question of the revised definition of offence. But there was no debate at all about submitting the seven named above, excepting as to the third article. Dr. Armstrong's report stated that there had been reported by the Revision Committee three propositions, submitted by various Presbyteries, as follows: (1.) Allowing adults regular in attending on the common ordinances and contributing regularly to the support of the pastor to vote in such elections along with Church members. (2.) What is known as the Memphis Assembly's compromise rule, allowing a separate vote to non-communicating members, to be submitted to the Presbytery as information. (3.) Confining the election strictly to members of the Church in full communion. Dr. B. M. Smith moved to withhold the first form and submit only the two last. Dr. Adger said he had hoped the Assembly's time would not be occupied at all with these seven articles which were to go to the Presbyteries for a separate vote, seeing there are some five and twenty other amendments to be discussed and decided by this body. But he was very desirous that all three propositions, touching the election of pastors, should be submitted together for the choice of the Presbyteries. There is a very great difference of opinion in the Church on this subject. Numbers one and three are the extremes, number two is a compromise, which he feared must work badly, by setting the inside and the outside elements in opposition. It is an invitation to contention between them. If either form is to be dropped, let us drop this compromise and leave the Presbyteries to choose between the extremes. For himself, he was decidedly in favor of the liberal rule, as were large numbers of brethren and possibly whole Presbyteries,

and he hoped the Assembly would not refuse to let the Church consider its merits. The class of outsiders whom it would favor are the most hopeful class, and we should seek to attract them and not repel. Gov. Marye, ruling elder from East Hanover Presbytery, earnestly opposed the liberal rule. He was not insensible to the social value of the non-communicating element in the Church, but was not willing to let it ever have control in the election of a pastor. Dr. Smith's motion was lost; 34 yeas to 71 nays. And then the seven propositions were sent down. Subsequently Gen. Prince's motion was carried without any debate, and an eighth article, touching "offence," was added.

The *second recommendation* was taken up, and eleven amendments in the Revised Form by various Presbyteries were considered and acted on. None of them were of any fundamental importance, and yet they could not be classed with mere verbal emendations. The *first* one proposed to strike out the title *missionary* from the names given to the minister of the word, on the ground that this one alone is not found in Scripture. It was adopted. The *second* amendment proposed to add to Chapter Fourth, Section 2d, an article coming in betwixt the sixth and the seventh, in these words: "When a minister is called to labor through the press or in any other needful work, it shall be incumbent on him to make full proof of his ministry by disseminating the gospel for the edification of the Church." The idea evidently is to recognise the press as a legitimate tool of the gospel ministry. There was opposition made to this view. The Rev. R. T. Berry said that the editing of a newspaper is no part of a minister's work. You are violating the Scriptures and our constitution in recognising this as a ministerial calling. If there be anything calculated to injure our church, it is the course of the so-called religious press. The Rev. A. J. Loughridge demanded to be informed from whom comes this "call" to be an editor. Dr Armstrong replied, it comes from the Holy Ghost, and the Presbytery must judge of it as of any other "call." Mr. Loughridge rejoined, that the religious paper, so-called, is an agency of strife that is doing immense evil in our Church. The editors should be held responsible for everything that appears in

their columns, even for those humbug advertisements they frequently admit. Dr. Adger called attention to the place in which this amendment is to be inserted. The doctrine of the Revised Form, Chap. IV., Section 2, Art. III., is that "the Church is authorised to call and appoint ministers to labor as pastors, teachers, and evangelists, and *in such other works* as may be needful to the Church, according to the gifts in which they excel." Then the duties of the pastor are defined, then those of the Theological Professor or College Chaplain, and then it is proposed to say that the *editor*, who is called by the Church to be such, must preach the gospel and teach sound doctrine with his types, and, in fine, must do just what the last speaker said that he ought to do, but does not. The judgment of our times is so settled that the press is a mighty instrument for good or for evil. We are irrevocably committed as a Church to the legitimate use of the press. He was prepared to have the Church elect its editors as the Methodists do ; and perhaps that is the very way to cure the evils that have been charged on our editors. Does any one want Scripture for the use of the pen and the types in disseminating the Word ? Why, is not the Scripture itself just the written and the printed word of God ? And who will venture to decide whether Paul the Apostle was most useful when he preached, or when he wrote the Epistles ? The amendment was adopted by a vote of 73 yeas to 27 nays.

The *third* amendment proposed to make it obligatory on the Church to commit the temporal matters of the Church to the deacons, by substituting the word "shall" where the Revised Form has used "may." It was not agreed to.

The *fourth* amendment related to Chapter V., Section 1, Art. III., where it is written : "The pastor is moderator of all congregational assemblies." Naturally enough, some of the Presbyteries, as well as members of the Assembly, supposed the reference must be to meetings of the congregation, and it was proposed to insert after *Moderator*, the words "of the session and." Dr. Adger pointed out how the obscurity of meaning in the Revised Form had arisen from a too close following of the terminology of the present Book. It says the Church is to be "governed by

congregational, presbyterial, and synodical assemblies,” and, of course, “congregational assemblies” means simply *sessions*. The Section is describing our various courts, and has no reference to meetings of the congregation as such. Accordingly, the Assembly, by vote, made the clause read thus: “The pastor is Moderator of the session.”

The *fifth* amendment provided for the calling together of a session, where there is no pastor, by two elders. It was adopted.

The *sixth* amendment makes a distinction in Chapter V., Section 4, Art. X., between “corresponding members” and “visiting brethren.” Adopted.

The *seventh* amendment strikes out of Chapter VI., Section 4, Art. I., the words “the session shall hold free conference with reference to his vocation and obligation to accept the office.” Adopted.

The *eighth* amendment strikes out of the same Chapter and Section, Art. 5, the words “*of the ceremony of.*” Adopted.

The *ninth* amendment strikes out of the same Chapter, Section 5, Art. III., the last sentence of the paragraph relative to a fast day. Adopted.

The *tenth* amendment proposed to alter Chapter VII., Art. II., so that it would not be necessary for a second Assembly to sanction any proposed change in the Book of Church Order. The Assembly rejected the amendment.

The *eleventh* amendment proposed a substitute in Chapter IV., Section 1, Art. I., of the words “united them to the household of faith,” for the words “formed them into one body.” The object was to guard against the error that the New Testament Church is not the very same Church established by the Lord at the beginning. Adopted.

The Assembly then passed to the consideration of the fourteen amendments in the Revised Discipline, which had been proposed by various Presbyteries.

The *first* one proposed to leave out of Chapter II., Art. I., the words “continues during the minority of their children and.” The Assembly rejected it.

The *second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh* and *eighth* amendments, being verbal, though valuable, were all adopted.

The *ninth* proposed to alter Chapter IX., Art. XIII., so that on the discovery of new evidence, either the accused party or the Church itself may demand a new trial. A lively discussion ensued, and several ruling elders of the legal profession took earnest part in it. Mr. Brooke, of Chesapeake Presbytery, said it was a fundamental principle of criminal law that no man shall be twice jeopardised for the same cause. He would be sorry to see the Presbyterian Church adopt a principle which the civilisation of the world repudiates *in favorem libertatis*. Col. Billups, of Augusta Presbytery, fully concurred with Mr. Brooke. It would be subversive of right to allow a movement for a new trial to be made by the officers of the law. Col. Anderson, of the Presbytery of South Alabama, said this provision is in the Constitution of the United States and of every particular State. It is a part of the common law, and has grown out of the experience of many past ages. It is also a part of the civil law, and reaches back beyond the days of Justinian. And then it is a maxim of law that there should be an end of litigation—*ut sit finis litigationis*. If this be a good maxim for the State, much more for the Church which wants peace and quietness. Of all disturbing elements in any community, a criminal trial is perhaps the very worst. The provision for a second trial would just open the way for the inroads of malice. It would only be malice that would, in general, call for the second trial. The amendment was rejected.

The tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth amendments were all adopted, without giving rise to any discussion. They are not without value, but require no comment here.

Subsequently, another amendment was made, so altering the whole of Chapter VI., Art. V., as to make it read thus: "In drawing the indictment, the times, places, and circumstances should, if possible, be particularly stated, that the accused may have full opportunity to make his defence."

Having disposed of the amendments, the Assembly passed to the *third recommendation* of its Committee, providing for the appointment by the next Assembly of a committee to perfect the style of the Book, should the Presbyteries send up favorable answers respecting it, as now amended and submitted to them. The

Rev. W. H. Davis objected that, unintentionally this committee might modify the teachings of the Book. Dr. Adger said there were perhaps hundreds of these merely verbal changes proposed by the Presbyteries, and that no Assembly could possibly deal with them directly. The Rev. G. W. Finley offered as a substitute for the Committee's recommendation, the following:

“Resolved, That the Revised Book, as amended by this Assembly, be put into the hands of a committee of five, to revise the style and language of the same in the light of the criticisms sent up to this Assembly, and that the same be printed and sent down to the Presbyteries.”

Dr. Adger seconded and urged the adoption of the substitute. It was carried. Then the report was recommitted, with instructions to report an overture, to be sent down to the Presbyteries, proposing the Revised Book, as amended, for their adoption, and specifically presenting the eight points for their separate votes. On the next day, Dr. Armstrong, the Chairman, presented the report of the overture, which was adopted, as follows:

“The General Assembly, having carefully revised the Book of Church Order, amending it in a number of particulars suggested in the papers sent up by the Presbyteries, and through its committee corrected its language and style, now send it down to the Presbyteries to be acted upon as follows, viz. :

“The Presbyteries are directed—

“I. To vote upon the adoption of the Book as a whole.

“II. To take a separate and distinct vote upon the adoption of each of the following parts of the Book, viz.:

- 1. Form of Government, Chapter V., Section 4, Article II.*
- 2. Form of Government, Chapter V., Section 4, Article V. The first sentence of the Article.*
- 3. Form of Government, Chapter V., Section 7.*
- 4. Form of Government, Chapter VI., Section 3, Article IV. The Presbyteries will adopt one of the three forms of this Article contained in the Book.*
- 5. Book of Discipline, Chapter III., Article I., and Chapter I. Article II. of the present Book of Discipline, as alternative propositions, adopting one of them.*

6. Book of Discipline, Chapter XII., Article I.
7. Book of Discipline, Chapter XII., Article II.
8. Book of Discipline, Chapter XII., Article III.

“The Presbyteries are further directed to send up to the next General Assembly a properly authenticated record of their vote upon each of these several points.”

On motion of Dr. Armstrong, it was

“*Resolved*, That the Committee of Publication be instructed to have the Book of Church Order, as now revised, printed, and, as soon as practicable, that a copy be sent to each minister and each session in the Church.”

Drs. Adger, Palmer, and Armstrong, with Ruling Elders Marrye and Anderson, were appointed the Committee on style and language, under Mr. Finley’s resolution. This Committee met on the morning after the dissolution of the Assembly, in Dr. Palmer’s study, and accomplished their task before separating. They felt it to be their duty to confine themselves strictly to such merely verbal and literary amendments as were sent up from Presbyteries.

PLACE OF NEXT MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY.

On the second day, on motion of Dr. Welch, nominations being called for, Knoxville, St. Louis, the Second church, Charlotte, and Wilmington, were nominated, and very warm pleas in favor of each were urged by various advocates. It was not a little gratifying to see what a cordial welcome was held out from so many different places. The Rev. Mr. McCallie said the First church, Knoxville, would take good care of the Assembly and treat them well. Knoxville had never had the meeting ; and has had its trials, both during the war and since. That First church building was battered and abused and the pews torn out of it, and for a long time after the war possession of the building was withheld. But through years that church had stood up nobly and sublimely in the midst of much opposition for true Presbyterianism, and to every call of this Assembly that scarred and battered church has cordially responded; and now then, in answer to their earnest invitation, go there and give them the

