

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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The 155th General Assembly: An Interpretative Report

THE commissioners to the 155th General Assembly convened in the Masonic Temple at Detroit, Michigan, on May the 27th. The number present was only about half of that in recent years due to the fact that all but four of the presbyteries, following the recommendation of the General Council, ignored the provision of the Constitution (Form of Government, Chap. XII, Sec. 2) which makes it mandatory that "each presbytery, consisting of not more than twenty-four ministers, shall [not may] send one minister and one elder; and each presbytery, consisting of more than twenty-four ministers, shall [not may] send one minister and one elder for each additional twenty-four ministers, or for each fractional number of ministers not less than twelve" and acted as though the Constitution provided that each presbytery should send only one-half that many ministers and elders. The occasion of this recommendation, as everyone knows, was the travel and accommodation emergency created by the war. We would not be understood as condemning the General Council for recommending and the presbyteries for so generally following their recommendation but it should be clearly understood that the General Council acted *ultra vires* in making the recommendation and that the presbyteries acted illegally in obeying it.

The morning session of the first day of the Assembly included worship, a sermon by the retiring Moderator and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Dr. Stuart Nye Hutchison of Pittsburgh preached a forward-looking sermon on the text: "The sons of strangers shall build thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee; for in my wrath I smote

thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee" (Isaiah 60:10). No summary could do it justice. In our judgment it was not only timely but one of the best moderatorial sermons in many a year. We could have wished that he had in the course of his sermon emphasized those "grand particularities" of the Gospel which the Liberals are accustomed to ignore if not to openly deny. In that case we would not lack assurance that he did not have in mind the differences that divide orthodox Presbyterians and Auburn Affirmationists when he concluded thus: "Yes, the trumpets of God are sounding, calling the Church to strike its tents and march. Can we not forever forget the non-essential differences which perhaps in the past have separated us, and move out shoulder to shoulder toward the fulfillment of the divine purpose for us?" Such a statement is meaningless unless we know what is included among "non-essential differences."

Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin Elected Moderator

The afternoon session of the first day was devoted to the election of a Moderator by the Assembly sitting as a whole and to the election of the members of the Standing Committees (except their chairmen who are appointed by the Moderator) by the twenty-two electing sections into which the Assembly is divided by its standing rules, sitting separately.

Two ministers only were nominated for the position of Moderator—a fact which made it certain that but one ballot would be needed to secure an election. The name of Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin of

the Presbytery of New York was presented by Dr. George A. Buttrick of the same Presbytery and seconded by Dr. H. Ray Anderson of the Presbytery of Chicago. The name of Dr. George H. Talbott of the Presbytery of Jersey City was presented by Dr. Arthur N. Butz of the Presbytery of Morris and Orange and seconded by Dr. Thomas Law Coyle of the Presbytery of Los Angeles. Dr. Coffin received 291 votes and Dr. Talbott 159. On motion of Dr. Talbott the election was made unanimous. As a presiding officer Dr. Coffin, needless to say, was all that could be desired.

The necessity for extended comment on the significance of this election is obviated by the fact that we are reprinting in this issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY what we wrote about "Dr. Coffin as a Candidate for Moderator" in our Pre-Assembly number (May) which was sent to all the commissioners by first class mail at least ten days preceding the meeting of the Assembly. This fact of itself—it does not stand alone—is sufficient to make clear that the commissioners to the 155th General Assembly did not act in ignorance of what they were doing when they elected the Church's outstanding Auburn Affirmationist and the President of Union Theological Seminary, the country's leading Modernist seminary, as their Moderator by a vote of nearly two to one. It is possible that a few of the commissioners were misled by the nominating speeches of Drs. Buttrick and Anderson—speeches that were constructed on the pragmatic principle that truth is what works—but certainly not many. The necessity for extended comment on our part is further obviated by the comments in other publications—*The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, *The United Presbyterian* and *The Calvin Forum* among others—which may be found on the pages following this report.

Naturally the Auburn Affirmationists and those in sympathy with their position are greatly elated over Dr. Coffin's election inasmuch as they interpret it, not without warrant, as a vindication of their contention that its signers "cannot be justly charged with unfaithfulness to their ordination engagements, with revolt against rightful authority in the church, or with forsaking Christian belief." *The Presbyterian Tribune*, professed organ of the liberals, states editorially (July-August issue): "The election of the Moderator, so it was said by many at the General Assembly, was a great day for the Church. . . . The election was a mile-stone in the history of our Church, marking memorable advance. It is fortunate that before the meeting of the Assembly an attempt was made, by rather extensive propaganda, for the avowed purpose of influencing the election, to revive the controversy which came near to rending the Church in twain twenty years ago, and that everything that could have been thought of as helpful to this end was raked out of the past. Fortunate this was, because the outcome showed how times have changed. Now it is no

longer possible to make headway by contending that evangelical Christianity is the same thing as fundamentalism. More than could have been dreamed of in 1923 it has been learned that Christians can and do hold the truth of the gospel and proclaim it with power without subscribing to the distinctive fundamental tenets. This process has been going on all these years. This year a seal was put upon it. What has been going on is not so much that men's opinions have changed as that the Church has been gaining in Christian liberty and mutual confidence, and in the unity of the Spirit. This year this gain was signally forwarded. The way is now open for us to go ahead in the service of the Kingdom of God, to the tasks before us, tasks that challenge the faith and strength of a united Church."

The election of Dr. Coffin as Moderator of the General Assembly is, in our opinion, the ripened fruit of that policy of appeasement in dealing with the "Liberals" that has prevailed in the Presbyterian Church since the appointment of the Commission of Fifteen in 1925 following the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission in the "Gantz case". That decision sustained the contention of Gantz and others that New York Presbytery had erred in licensing candidates who were unable to affirm "clear and positive" belief in the Virgin Birth of our Lord and by implication condemned the Auburn Affirmation as a whole. Immediately following the reading of this decision, however, Dr. Coffin in behalf of the Commissioners from New York Presbytery and Dr. J. V. Moldenhawer in behalf of the Synod of New York rushed to the platform and expressed their open defiance of the decision. Intimidated by this action the Assembly adopted a resolution providing that "a Commission of Fifteen be appointed to study the present spiritual condition of our Church and the causes making for unrest, and to report to the next General Assembly, to the end that the peace, purity, unity and progress of the Church may be assured." The report of this Commission, as presented and adopted in 1926 and 1927, as is well known, virtually annulled the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission in the "Gantz case" and commended the policy of appeasement under the protection of which the "Liberals," by use of the method of infiltration—a method they were in a position to employ from the start through their control of New York Presbytery—has gone on from strength to strength until now it would seem that they are in all but complete control of the situation. It was in March, 1926, before the Commission of Fifteen had made its first report, that Dr. Coffin wrote the article in *The Forum* in which he said, "I am a Presbyterian only temporarily." Apparently he was thinking of leaving the Presbyterian Church at that time. Had he done so it would not, we believe, have rent the Church "in twain" as the editorial in the *Presbyterian Tribune* is fitted to suggest. Rather, if we mistake not, it would have

produced less of a breach than did the departure of the late J. Gresham Machen. If such was his thought, it was abandoned following the adoption of the report of the Commission of Fifteen and since that time those who share his views have wrought with such success for the control of the Church that no longer content to vote for some "conservative acceptable to the liberals" they have placed their recognized leader in the Moderator's chair. Small wonder that they are in an exultant mood. We can only hope that their success will be instrumental in opening the eyes of Presbyterians in general to the existing situation and thus lead to a reaction toward better things. Be that as it may, in our opinion at least, the outcome to date of the policy of appeasement followed in dealing with the Auburn Affirmationists and those who share their views has not furthered the welfare of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. or the Church at large any more than the policy of appeasement followed for some years by England and France toward Hitler furthered the welfare either of those countries or of the world as a whole.

A Non-Deliberative Assembly

It had been thought by some that this year's Assembly would be an unusually deliberative one by reason of its reduced size. Such was not the case. If anything there was less speech this year from the floor than last year—which is saying a great deal—despite the fact that the Moderator gave every opportunity, even encouraged discussion. Report after report was adopted without a "nay" vote and with only a languid interest on the part of the commissioners. There was considerable interest taken in the report of the Special Committee on Theological Seminaries and the report of the Committee on a Righteous Peace (see below *re* this report) but otherwise the floor was all but passive and did little more than rubber-stamp what was proposed from the platform. This year's experience would seem to indicate that more than a reduced Assembly is needed—though that, we believe, is sorely needed—to make the Assembly what our Form of Government contemplates, a truly deliberative body. Witness the fact that commissioners to the General Assembly are instructed by their presbyteries "to consult, vote, and determine, on all things that may come before that body, according to the principles and constitution of this Church, and the Word of God." A number of things would conduce to that end. For one thing presbyteries ought to discontinue the practice of electing ministers to the Assembly because it is their turn and of electing elders from churches which have been longest without representation. Such a practice is thoroughly un-*Presbyterian*. We do not always agree with the *Presbyterian Tribune* but the following statement from its September issue has our unqualified approval;

"To make our Synods and General Assembly truly representative courts, presbyteries ought to elect commissioners who stand for *principles*. We elect representatives to legislatures and to the Congress because of the things for which they stand. If presbyteries have convictions about the great issues before the Church, they ought to send commissioners to the higher judicatories who properly reflect those convictions, and who can contribute to the thought and deliberations of the higher bodies." It seems to us, also, that the Assembly should follow a more flexible docket. No doubt a docket is necessary but there is nothing sacrosanct about the one proposed by the Stated Clerk. Otherwise it lies within the power of the Stated Clerk to determine the period that shall be devoted to the consideration of any particular issues to come before the Assembly and thereby unduly influence action thereon. There is no good reason, it seems to us, why the time for adjourning the Assembly should be fixed beforehand. The time should be left indefinite and the Assembly adjourn only after but as soon as it has fully completed its deliberations. To assume that the Assembly must keep to the schedule proposed by the Stated Clerk is inimical to anything like free and full debate. The primary purpose of the Assembly should be regarded as deliberative rather than inspirational and there is no sufficient reason why our Assembly, like that of the Southern Presbyterian Assembly, should not hold evening sessions. Woodrow Wilson once said of Princeton University that the side-shows were being regarded as more important than the main show. If we mistake not, something like that is true of our General Assembly.

Church Cooperation and Union

The Department of Church Cooperation and Union, as usual, figured largely in the proceedings of the Assembly—somewhat larger, it seems to us, than anything yet accomplished by this Department would seem to warrant. The Department reported the "Basic Principles" and "Suggested Cooperative Arrangements during Negotiations for Organic Union," which had been adopted at a joint meeting with the Commission on Approaches to Unity of the Protestant Episcopal Church at Atlantic City, N. J., on June 24, 1942, and sent to the presbyteries for "study and report" but gave no intimation concerning the reaction of the presbyteries to these proposals other than to say that many helpful suggestions had been received. The Department requested permission "to send a revised issue of the 'Basic Principles' if in joint conference such a revision is proposed," but the stress it placed on the fact that it was giving priority to union negotiations with Churches of the Presbyterian family indicated that it was not very hopeful of a favorable outcome to the negotiations with the Protestant Episcopal Church. Probably it was aware or at least had had

intimations of the fact that the Commission on Approaches to Unity of the Protestant Episcopal Church would present a minority as well as a majority report to their General Convention meeting in Cleveland the 2nd of October. Be that as it may, that is now known to be a fact as both reports have already been published. The majority report is signed by twelve members and the minority report by three. The minority report is flatly opposed to union with the Presbyterian Church along the lines suggested in "Basic Principles" and recommends that all the present members of the Commission on Approaches to Unity be relieved of further service and that an entirely new membership be appointed which shall be more representative of the whole Church. Even if the majority report is adopted, however, union with the Episcopal Church is far in the future at the best inasmuch as it asks that any plan of union before being submitted to the General Convention for final action be referred to the Lambeth Conference for consideration and advice. This decennial meeting of Anglican bishops from all over the world was scheduled to meet in London in 1940 but postponed by reason of the war and no date has as yet been set for its next meeting.

The majority report expresses the notion that the Presbyterian Church is willing to accept the Historic Episcopate which it asserts is an essential which must be preserved in any union to which an Anglican Church is party. The minority report, with better warrant it seems to us, expresses the opinion that Presbyterians are "by no means ready to accept the Historic Episcopate". We say this despite the fact that the majority report states that "the Department of Church Cooperation and Union of the Presbyterian Church have given us the assurance of their willingness to recommend to the Presbyterian Church the acceptance of the Historic Episcopate." If we mistake not, the fact that our Department of Church Cooperation and Union have given the Episcopalians this assurance raises the question whether our General Assembly should not be asked to do what the minority report of the Episcopal Commission on Approaches to Unity asks its next General Convention to do, viz., so revise its membership that it will be more representative of the whole Church. We await with interest the action of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in October. (Since the above was written said General Convention side-stepped the issue by voting to postpone action until its next meeting in 1946.)

The Southern Presbyterian Church

The Assembly exhibited marked interest in the report of the Department on Cooperation and Union concerning union with the Southern Presbyterian Church. In fact from the opening words of Dr. Coffin as Moderator declaring that "the first

task before us is to seek to unify our Presbyterian family. I want this year to take every step I can toward furthering our reunion with the Presbyterian Church in the United States" every reference to this proposed union was greeted with enthusiastic applause except when the Stated Clerk toward the close of the Assembly reported that he had received word that the Southern Assembly had voted to recommit the proposed Plan of Reunion to its Permanent Committee instead of voting to distribute it throughout the Church for "study and report" as our Assembly had done—an action that made it necessary for our Assembly to reconsider its action and content itself with authorizing the Department to print and distribute the Plan of Reunion if and when the way be clear.

The Plan of Reunion, just alluded to, is detailed and aims to be complete. As presented it constitutes a booklet of 237 pages and consists of (1) certain Concurrent Declarations stating the conditions and understandings under which the reunion proposed is to be effected (2) the Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechism as these have been amended by one or both of the Churches (3) the Book of Church Order in which is included (a) the Form of Government (b) the Book of Discipline and (c) the Directory of Worship and (4) General Rules for Judicatories. In the Book of Church Order an effort has been made to combine and systematize the best in each of the existing churches.

Inasmuch as the Plan of Reunion is not as yet before the Churches it would be hardly fitting for us to discuss any of its details. Suffice it to say that our Department of Church Cooperation and Union yielded much of what it had formerly insisted on in order to meet the demands of our Southern brethren. Here we refer particularly to the fact that the Regional Synod idea is basic to the proposed Plan of Reunion. As proposed the united Church will be divided in nineteen Regional Synods and all judicial cases in which "the doctrine of the Church or the interpretation of the constitution" is not directly involved are to be settled finally by the Regional Synod of jurisdiction. We also refer to the fact that Concurrent Declaration 17 provides that in the reunited Church the separation of Church and State is to be regarded as of basic importance. The Plan provides that the South shall have one-third of the members at large of the General Council and one-third of the members of the Permanent Judicial Commission though only about one-fifth of the membership of the Church would be in the South. The Plan also provides that the Plan of Reunion may not be amended without the consent of the South by providing that when amendments are under consideration the Church is to be divided into six areas—two of which will be in the South—and that none of the essential features of the Plan may be changed or amended except by

an affirmative vote of a majority of the presbyteries in each area.

In view of the extent to which the proposed Plan of Reunion goes to meet the standing demands of the Southern Church it seems somewhat strange that its Assembly rejected the recommendation of its Committee to place copies of it in the hands of its ministers and laymen for study and suggestions and took the following action on recommendation of its Standing Committee on Foreign Relations:

"In view of the fact that this proposed Plan for Reunion is only the first draft of a report prepared by a sub-committee . . . and that due to limited time available for its consideration, it has not received careful study and approval by the whole committee; and inasmuch as it is obviously the unanimous judgment of the whole committee as well as of the sub-committee that it would be unwise for the Assembly to take any action at this time which might precipitate a Church-wide discussion of this highly controversial matter in the stress of the war emergency;

We therefore recommend:

That this whole question be left in the hands of the Permanent Committee on Co-operation and Union for careful study and consideration, and that the committee be authorized and directed to continue its explorations along the lines laid down and in accordance with instructions given by former Assemblies.

Inasmuch as the general circulation of the printed Plan of Reunion in its present form might precipitate premature and needless discussion and might prejudice or delay unduly the prospect of ultimate agreement on any plan, no provision should be made for further distribution of the proposed plan until it has been approved by the permanent committee on Co-operation and Union. . . ."

The reason alleged, viz., that the proposed Plan of Reunion had been prepared by a sub-committee, hardly offers an adequate explanation inasmuch as the committee as a whole must have been acquainted with its main provisions especially in view of the fact that it was being proposed not for final action but merely for study and suggestions. This raises the question as to the extent to which the action of the Southern Assembly was influenced by the fact that the Northern Assembly had elected Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin as its Moderator. Previous to the Assembly we expressed the thought that the election of Dr. Coffin "would greatly retard, if it would not altogether prevent, union with the Southern Presbyterian Church in anything like the near future." Following the Assembly *The Presbyterian* declared that the election of Dr. Coffin had resulted in a severe set-back to the proposed reunion of the two churches. This was denied in a statement by ex-Moderator Wm. L. Young published in the *Church Times* (July 17) under the title "Refutes Charge" though Dr. Young's statement could be regarded as a refutation only if a vigorous denial is the equivalent of a convincing argument. It is impossible, of course, to say positively to what extent, if any, the Southern Assembly was influenced by the fact that the Northern Assembly had elected Dr. Coffin as its Moderator. There can be no doubt, however, it seems to us, that the election of such an outstanding Auburn

Affirmationist as Dr. Coffin as Moderator of our Assembly has strengthened the determination of a large element in the Southern Church to do every thing it can to prevent reunion with the Northern Church—an affirmative vote of three-fourths of all the presbyteries is required to effect reunion—until it gives evidence of greater concern for sound doctrine. Witness the following that appeared in the July issue of *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* under the title "Doctrine vs. Union"—a journal which it is safe to say reflects the judgment of more than a fourth of the presbyteries of the Southern Church:

"Whereas, the Southern Presbyterian Church has always laid great emphasis on purity of doctrine, and,

Whereas, we feel that the revival for which we pray is unquestionably predicated on a faithful belief in and presentation of the great doctrines on which our Church was founded and for which she still stands, viz.:

1. That it is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scriptures as to keep them from error.

2. That it is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that our Lord Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.

3. That it is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that Christ offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and to reconcile us to God.

4. That it is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, that on the third day He rose from the dead with the same body with which He suffered, with which He also ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of God, making intercession.

5. That it is an essential doctrine of the Word of God as the Supreme standard of our faith that our Lord Jesus Christ showed His power and love by working mighty miracles. This working was not contrary to nature but superior to it.

Whereas, a large number of ministers in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., have affirmed their conviction that the above mentioned doctrines are not essential to ordination, said statement having become known as the Auburn Affirmation.

Whereas, the signers of said Auburn Affirmation continue not only in good standing in their Church but are also in ever increasing numbers being elected and appointed to positions of authority and power within said Church,

And, whereas, the 1941 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was overtured by the Presbytery of Cedar Rapids to help pave the way for union between the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and our Southern Presbyterian Church by stating unequivocally faith in these essential doctrines as being involved in the ordination vows to which our ministers subscribe,

And, whereas, the said 1941 General Assembly of the U.S.A. Church refused to adopt this overture,

And, whereas, until the doctrinal basis of union is clear, said union would of necessity involve the placing of our small minority Church under the jurisdiction and power of a larger group tolerant to a doctrinal inclusive policy to which we cannot submit.

And, whereas, such agitation cannot possibly work for either peace or purity within the Church.

This Journal believes: That the present efforts along the line of friendly co-operation may be continued but that all efforts looking to Organic Union with the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., be discontinued until such time as said

Church finds its way clear to reaffirm these essential doctrines of the Church to be necessary to and implicit in the ordination vows of all its ministers."

Theological Education

It has been encouraging to note the increased interest which the Church has been taking in theological education in recent years. We could wish that it was more like the interest which the Church exhibited some fifty years ago when it withdrew its approval of Union Theological Seminary because of its heretical teachings. The present interest, however, does not seem to include any marked concern over the content of theological education. Men less orthodox than was Dr. Briggs have been confirmed in recent years as professors without debate and the President of Union Seminary, whom Dr. Briggs himself were he living today would no doubt regard as something of a heretic, has just been honored by being elected Moderator of the Assembly by an overwhelming majority that was made unanimous. Ways and means of securing the needed number of properly qualified men for the ministry and of raising the standards for their training are important but not as important as the question whether after attending our seminaries they leave them with a genuinely Christian message. After all *what* is preached is more important than *how* it is preached. For the Church to concern itself about educational standards while indifferent to the message that is proclaimed from its pulpits is very much like tithing mint and anise and cummin while neglecting weightier matters. None the less we rejoice over the present concern over theological education in the Presbyterian Church. The fact that a poorly educated minister whose message centers around Christ and Him as crucified may prove more efficient than a highly educated modernist minister—witness the growth of the sects—is no reason why every possible effort should not be made to provide the Church with as highly trained a ministry as possible. When a highly trained man is ineffective as a minister it is not because he has too much education but too little of something else. A well educated ministry is absolutely necessary for the well-being if not for the being of the Christian Church. "The future of Christendom and of civilization", the Special Committee on Theological education said not without warrant, "depends on the ability of the church to send forth men of God with high scholastic standing and passionately devoted to unselfish service to the Cross of Christ."

There was much of interest in the report of the Standing Committee on Theological Seminaries. It not only recommended the continuance of the seminaries in the basic budget of the Church but that they be given a larger percentage of the budget than the present two per cent. It recommended the approval of the election of some seven theological

professors in as many of our seminaries and the election of Dr. Henry A. Riddle, Jr., as President of Western Seminary and of Dr. John H. Ballard as Vice-President of San Francisco Seminary; also the request of the Chicago Seminary to change its name back to McCormick Theological Seminary and to combine its two Boards of Control.

The interest taken in the report of the standing Committee, however, was secondary to the interest taken in the report of the Special Committee on Theological Education. This Committee, it will be recalled, was authorized by the 1940 Assembly and made preliminary reports to the 1941 and 1942 Assemblies. This year, however, it presented what was in effect its final report despite the fact that it was continued for another year in the interest of carrying out certain of its provisions. In our report of the 1942 Assembly we expressed some fear over the work of this committee because of its liberal complexion—two of its members being signers of the Auburn Affirmation and the others not being unfriendly thereto as evidenced by the fact that it had chosen Dr. Ilion T. Jones as its chairman. At that time it looked somewhat as though this committee intended to have the General Assembly tell the seminaries what they were to teach and even that it intended to recommend that the seminaries be placed under the Board of Christian Education. The outcome shows that what we feared did not happen. The Committee decided wisely, so it seems to us, that "the problem of curriculum revision is not a matter primarily to be determined by General Assembly action but for study and action by the experts in the seminaries" and confined itself to expressing certain convictions and judgments relative to this matter. Moreover the Committee made no effort to place the seminaries under the Board of Christian Education as part of the general educational policy of the Church. The result was a report of outstanding merit and one fitted to exert a beneficial influence on theological education without as well as within the Presbyterian Church. It was not without warrant that the Standing Committee on Theological Seminaries spoke of it as a "magnificent report" that "showed statesmanship, limitless research, far-reaching vision and courage."

This report, including the appendices, is approximately 30,000 words in length and must be read and studied to be appreciated. Suffice it for us to say in this connection that it made its recommendation bearing on a policy of theological education for the Presbyterian Church under the following heads: (1) Recruiting for the Ministry, (2) Pre-Seminary Supervision of Students, (3) The Theological Seminaries, (4) Schools for Training Lay Workers, (5) Post-Seminary Education, (6) Organization for Cooperation and Coordination and (7) Financial Support of Theological Education. Under the third heading the report discusses such matters as the admission, transfer and aid of students, standards

for theological seminaries, curriculum study and revision, faculty requirements, student group life, degrees, training for specialized fields such as professorships and rural pastors, relation of the seminaries to the Boards and agencies of the Church and the number and location of the seminaries (the Assembly voted to discontinue Omaha Seminary and took action looking toward the discontinuance of Dubuque, Bloomfield and Lincoln unless their situations can be bettered in the near future). This bare outline indicates the comprehensiveness but not the richness of the report.

Particular significance attaches to its recommendation under the sixth heading, referred to above. The Committee recommended the disbanding of the Council of Presbyterian Theological Seminaries and the establishment by the Assembly of the Council on Theological Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. whose membership shall be composed mainly of representatives from the seminaries fully under the control of the Assembly, the Church at large and the Boards of the Assembly. The action taken provides that the Council shall have six representatives from the Church at large and six from the Boards (four from the Board of Education and one each from the Boards of National and Foreign Missions) and one representative from each of the seminaries fully under the control of the Assembly plus one additional for each fifty students. We added the modifying adverb "mainly" in the second sentence above because the action taken also provides that there shall be one representative from seminaries related cooperatively to the Assembly, one from any accredited Presbyterian Lay-leadership Training School which is maintained on a graduate level as a separate institution and one advisory representative from each seminary not controlled by or related cooperatively to the Assembly which has more than fifty full-time undergraduate students who are recognized candidates for the ministry. The only seminary related cooperatively, of which we have knowledge, is Louisville Seminary and the only one which can qualify among those not controlled by or related cooperatively to the Assembly is Union Theological Seminary of New York City. This means, if we mistake not, that Union Seminary of New York City has been invited to have an advisory member on the Council on Theological Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The question naturally arises whether this is a first step toward removing the ban that for some fifty years has rested on Union Seminary as a training center for the ministry of our Church.

The functions of this Council will have to do with all matters within the range of theological education which call for joint action of the seminaries and the cooperation of the seminaries with the other agencies of the church. Obviously it will be in a position to exert a profound influence for

good or ill over the future of theological education within the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

Pronouncement re a Righteous Peace

The 1942 Assembly, apparently not pleased with the pacifistic tendencies of the Department of Social Education and Action, took from it the responsibility of expressing the mind of the Church on the war and the establishment of a righteous peace following the war and placed it in the hands of a special committee appointed by the Moderator. Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr was made the chairman of this committee and his associates were Drs. Henry Sloane Coffin, J. Harry Cotton, John A. Mackay and Robert E. Speer together with Messrs. Harold W. Dodds, Walter E. Hope and Thomas J. Watson. This committee presented a report to this year's Assembly which despite its faults is a big improvement over what the Department of Social Education and Action, judging from its past record, would have given us. It is not a pacifistic pronouncement as evidenced by the fact that it declares that "the possibility of a righteous peace depends upon the victory of the United Nations". That it is not free of faults—faults of a major sort—is evidenced by the fact, not to mention others, that it is grounded in a false view both of God and man. It teaches that God is the father of all men and that all men are brothers in a way that ignores the Scriptural teaching that men become the children of God only through faith in Jesus Christ. This means that both its theology and its anthropology are gravely at fault being in these respects modernistic rather than Calvinistic. Its length precludes our citing it as a whole—it took Dr. Kerr forty-five minutes to read it to the commissioners—but it may not only be found in full in the Minutes but obtained in pamphlet form from the Department of Social Education and Action at the Witherspoon Building in Philadelphia. The commissioners were given scant opportunity to consider it. It had not been printed in the Blue Book. Just why we do not know. Only an hour had been assigned to its consideration on the docket, and so, since the chairman used up three-fourths of this time reading it, only fifteen minutes were available for this purpose unless the time was extended by vote of the Assembly. As this was not done, one of the most important matters to be brought before the Assembly and one concerning which there was a difference of opinion was adopted without anything like adequate debate. A motion was made but quickly voted down to delete the clause, "We hold that the possibility of peace depends upon the victory of the United Nations which seek to establish political and religious freedom throughout the world" on the ground that it did not describe the policy of Great Britain in India. A motion was

also made to postpone the adoption of the report and send it to the presbyteries for study but this motion was also quickly defeated after being opposed on the somewhat specious ground that the instructions of the 1942 Assembly required the Committee to formulate a report for adoption by the 1943 Assembly since as a matter of fact the words used were "formulate a report for presentation to the next Assembly". While we judge that the report expressed the mind of the overwhelming majority of the commissioners—at least as far as they were able to form an opinion on the basis on hearing it read—yet it seems to us regrettable that more opportunity was not given to debate its provisions. Even if we fully approved the report—we gladly admit it contains much to commend—we would not approve the manner of its adoption. Sad to say, it affords a striking illustration of the method that has been frequently employed to obtain Assembly approval of a proposal. A committee is appointed, a certain period assigned on the docket for the consideration of its report, after which the chairman is given unlimited time for presenting it with the result that but little time is left for debate from the floor. At times—that did not happen this year—it is moved that individual speakers be limited to five- or ten-minute speeches in the interest of not getting behind the docket—a device which if adopted practically precludes anyone from making effective opposition to the action proposed. Only as free and full debate is permitted can we have any assurance that any particular Assembly pronouncement is an adequate expression of the mind of the Church. Stifling debate may create the impression of unity on the part of the commissioners but we do not think that it furthers the best interest of the Church.

Wartime Service Commission

It will be recalled that the 1942 Assembly established a Wartime Service Commission and assigned to it the work that had previously been performed by three separate organizations, viz., the United World Emergency Fund, the Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains and the Emergency Service Commission and delegated to it the task of raising not less than \$1,000,000 to be used for men in the service, war industry communities and foreign relief. This Commission reported that it had raised \$1,071,667.21. Much credit was given to Dr. Hutchison, its chairman, and Dr. Alexander E. Sharpe, its executive chairman, for the successful completion of this campaign. Far be it from us to detract from the praise given those in charge of this campaign. At the same time we do not think it greatly to the credit of the Presbyterian Church that it required so much effort on their part to bring this campaign to a successful conclusion. The million-dollar fund should have been over-

subscribed within a few months. It does not seem to us that the Church is to be highly commended for having given an average of fifty cents for this purpose. At the best, it seems to us, the Presbyterian Church as far as this matter is concerned resembles the boy or the girl who gets a bare passing mark in a school examination. In such a case they are saved from disgrace by passing but are not deserving of any high praise.

This year the Church is asked to contribute not less than \$1,256,592 to provide the minimum needs for the war-created responsibilities of the Presbyterian Church. This figure, it should be noted, indicates the minimum not the maximum amount needed for this purpose. It should be more than provided and that at an early date. Dr. Harold A. Dalzell, associate pastor of the Shadyside Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, is now Executive Director of the Commission, Dr. Sharpe having found it necessary to return to his work in the State of Indiana. Dr. Stuart Nye Hutchison has been retained as chairman of the Commission.

Special Committee on Conservation of Property

This committee did not figure largely in the proceedings of this year's Assembly. Its full report follows:

"The last General Assembly merged the Special Committee on Emergency Disasters and Special Committee on Legal Procedure, to form the Special Committee on Conservation of Property, to provide for any and all kinds of emergency problems of the Church. During the past year, the Committee has had three cases of churches which have suffered through flood conditions referred to it. Measures have been initiated to secure relief to these churches in co-operation with the Board of National Missions."

It will be recalled by some of our readers that in commenting on the Kalamazoo overture which was referred to the Special Committee on Conservation of Property—the Presbytery of Kalamazoo had overtured the Assembly to take such action as will protect the interest of the Church in such property and endowments as our schools, colleges and seminaries may acquire lest any of them declare themselves independent—we suggested that it would be well in performing the tasks thus assigned it to give proper consideration to the question whether the General Assembly at the present time possesses an effective legal control over Princeton Seminary and the property and endowments it has acquired or may acquire—it being our belief, supported by legal opinions of high standing, that such is not the case and that as matters have stood since its reorganization in 1929 it is a legal possibility for Princeton Seminary to declare itself independent. If the Committee is giving any heed to our suggestion, it has given no intimation of it.

A matter of more immediate interest has to do

with the question whether this committee on conservation of property was active in the legal case having to do with the will of the late William A. McKean of the Enon Valley Presbyterian Church of the Presbytery of Shenango (Pa.). Mr. McKean died on November 14, 1938, and a will dated September 4, 1935, after making various specific bequests provided that the remainder of his estate, if any, "be equally divided between the Home and Foreign Missions Boards of the Fundamentalist Branch of the Presbyterian Church." For this "remainder of his estate," which amounted to \$1381.82, four bodies laid claim, each claiming one-half of it, viz., the Board of Foreign Missions and the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and the Committee on National Missions of the Bible Presbyterian Church. As the decision of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania whose decision is final was not handed down until July 16, 1943, it was not to be expected that any reference to this matter would be found in the committee's report to this year's Assembly. It is natural to suppose, however, that it acted in behalf of the Boards of Foreign and National Missions in this matter. Be that as it may, the claims of both the Board of Foreign Missions and the Board of National Missions were overruled by the Court and the sum in dispute awarded equally to the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and the Committee on National Missions of the Bible Presbyterian Church. The lower court awarded half of the bequest to the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and half to the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. largely on the ground that since the Committee on National Missions of the Bible Presbyterian Church was not in existence until June, 1937, the testator could not have had it in mind when he wrote his will in 1935. From this decision the Committee on National Missions of the Bible Presbyterian Church appealed, and in the decision referred to above and handed down on July 16th, the Superior Court of Pennsylvania, the court of last resort in the matter, sustained the appeal and awarded it the funds in dispute mainly on the ground that the intention of the testator is paramount in construing a will and that it was clear that the testator in this case did not desire that any part of his estate should go to the official mission boards of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It should be added that the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. did not appeal the decision of the lower court in awarding one-half of Mr. McKean's residuary estate to the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions.

In the course of its decision the Superior Court said: "The question turns on what the testator

meant by the phrase, 'the Home and Foreign Missions Board of the Fundamentalist Branch of the Presbyterian Church.' The Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the highest executive officer of that denomination, appeared as a witness for the Boards of that church, and testified that he had never heard of a Fundamentalist Branch of the Presbyterian Church. In view of the overwhelming weight of the evidence we can only infer that he was giving too much weight to a narrow definition of the word, 'branch.' The auditor and the court below very properly held that the word was used by the testator as a synonym for 'group,' 'wing,' 'faction,' 'party,' 'section,' etc. . . . The word, 'Presbyterian' is used in two senses: One of a form of church government or polity; the other as a religious faith or doctrine, based on the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Any Church denomination, or religious body, that accepts and conforms to *both* of these meanings has the right to call itself 'Presbyterian.' While the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is the largest Presbyterian body in the United States, it has no monopoly of the name."

We hold no brief for either the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions or the Committee on National Missions of the Bible Presbyterian Church. Nevertheless we think not only that the Court very properly awarded them these funds but that both the Board of Home Missions and the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. acted in a manner fitted to bring discredit on said Church in seeking to secure these funds. Had they succeeded it would have been on a legal technicality that obviously involved the defeat of the intention of the testator. It is difficult to believe that they were not fully aware of the fact that they had no moral right to any part of the estate of the late Mr. McKean.

Miscellaneous

We have called attention to certain things that seem to us to call for special mention in connection with what on the whole was a dull and uneventful Assembly. Much of the time of the Assembly was consumed in reading previously printed reports of the Standing Committees on the Boards and agencies of the Church—"an unnecessary and uneconomical use of the Assembly's time and a frequent embarrassment to commissioners who wish to debate the report" in the words of an overture sent without results to the 1942 Assembly by the Presbytery of Jersey City and concurred in by more than eighty presbyteries. The same may be said, if we mistake not, of most of the speeches by the Board secretaries and their representatives. The limits of our space forbid any consideration

of these reports. They may be found in full in the Minutes of the Assembly. While they have to do for the most part with routine matters they contain much of interest and their pronouncements and recommendations are for the most part commendable. We could have wished that they had shown some concern about the liberalism and doctrinal indifferentism that manifest themselves in the councils and activities of the Boards and agencies of the Church but that was hardly to be expected in an Assembly that chose the Church's leading liberal as its Moderator.

The Special Committee on Evangelism which was appointed by the 1941 Assembly and which presented a comprehensive report to the 1942 Assembly in which it recommended that a National Commission on Evangelism be established "to meet the challenge of the Church in the formulation of a program of evangelism for the present crisis" made its final report through its chairman, Dr. Raymond C. Walker. Dr. Walker reported that the Committee had finished its work and asked that it be discharged. In accordance with the Committee's recommendation the Assembly set up a National Commission on Evangelism composed of twenty ministers and ten elders—ten appointed by the Board of National Missions, five by the Board of Christian Education and fifteen elected by the Assembly from the Church at large—and the General Secretaries of the Board of National Missions and the Board of Christian Education, the Secretary of the Unit of Evangelism, the Promotional Secretaries of the Board of Foreign Missions and the General Council, and the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. The action taken provides that the National Commission on Evangelism report annually to the Assembly through the newly authorized Standing Committee on Evangelism, "the report and its recommendations having been previously submitted to the Board of National Missions." Just why this latter provision was inserted is by no means clear and was not explained. The work of this Commission on Evangelism will be watched with much concern.

The Westminster Tercentenary was fittingly observed at the Sunday evening meeting under the auspices of the Department of History and the Board of Christian Education at which two notable addresses were delivered—one by Dr. J. Harry Cotton, president of McCormick Seminary on "The Sovereign God and Human Liberties" and the other by Dr. Edward Howell Roberts, dean of Princeton Seminary, on "The Faith of our Fathers." The former ably set forth the historical and present-day significance of the great statement of the Confession of Faith that "God alone is Lord of the conscience" (without touching, however, on the manner in which it was violated by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in its treatment of the members of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign

Missions) while the latter summarized in a brilliant manner the doctrinal teaching of the Westminster Standards in language understandable by the people.

The Assembly commended the Board of Pensions "for the care and thought it has given to the problem of formulating a sound and prudent investment policy and the progress it has made toward establishing a secure financial structure during the past year" but recognizing that matters connected with the Service Pension Plan have not yet been settled to the satisfaction of many of its members, as evidenced by the large number of overtures having to do with the Board of Pensions, voted to instruct the General Council to appoint a special committee "composed of five qualified laymen, competent and experienced in the field of insurance, investment law, accounting and administration" with authority "to review the entire Pension Fund situation, the administration of the Service Pension Plan and the organization of the Board." The members of this committee follow: William Speers, president of James McCutcheon and Company, New York, N. Y.; Frederick Russell, Binghamton, N. Y., president of the Security Mutual Life Insurance Company; Louis C. Weiss, Cleveland, Ohio, resident partner of Ernst and Ernst, Certified Public Accountants; Harry T. Wade, Indianapolis, Ind., vice-president and general manager of the Standard Life Insurance Company of Indiana; Frank P. Shepard, 16 Wall Street, New York, vice-president of the Bankers Trust Company, New York.

Two overtures—one from the Presbytery of Mahoning and the other from the Presbytery of New Brunswick—were addressed to the Assembly asking that steps be taken looking toward the publication of an official Church paper. These overtures were referred to the General Council for study and report. While ours is one of the few large churches not having such a paper, our experience, past and present, has not been of a nature to commend these requests very highly. The New Brunswick overture proposes a somewhat different type of paper than the Church has yet attempted, viz., "a magazine to be partly subsidized by General Assembly assessment and not by the Boards and to be therefore not primarily a promotional organ but a devotional and inspirational magazine for wide distribution among our Church families."

The Assembly voted hearty approval of the proposal to establish The National Council of Presbyterian Women. The next meeting of the Assembly will be held in Chicago.

Concluding Comment

Many will think that this report of the 155th General Assembly exhibits undue concern over the fact that Dr. Coffin was elected as its Moderator. Even *The Presbyterian* which would fain be regarded as still the recognized organ of the con-

servatives in our Church has declared through its ranking spokesman that "we have nothing to fear from the election of Dr. Coffin" (June 3rd) and has expressed no concern over his election other than to say that it has caused a severe set-back to the union negotiations between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches—a mode of expression fitted to indicate that it regards the election of Dr. Coffin merely as inopportune. We regard the matter far more seriously. As we view it, Dr. Coffin's election was not only inopportune but an event to be deplored both for what it is in itself and because of what it signifies relative to the situation in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It is easy, no doubt, to exaggerate its significance. The situation would not be essentially different if a "conservative acceptable to the liberals" had again been elected Moderator though in that case it would be less clear. The main significance of Dr. Coffin's election lies in the fact that it reveals, as perhaps nothing else could, apart

from a change of the Church's Standards bringing them into harmony with the Auburn Affirmation, the degree to which liberalism and doctrinal indifferentism have triumphed in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It is at least a satisfaction to have the situation clarified. Hence our reaction to Dr. Coffin's election is not one of unqualified regret. We even cherish the hope that it will prove a blessing in disguise by leading conservatives in the Church to make some concerted action to restore the leadership of the Church to those to whom it rightfully belongs. This may be merely wishful thinking inspired by the fear that otherwise the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. as an organization may be lost to the evangelical cause. Be that as it may, we consider it our present duty to do what we can toward supplying the Church at large with an interpretative report of its last General Assembly with special reference to the fact that it chose the Church's outstanding liberal as its Moderator.

Dr. Coffin's Election as Viewed by Other Presbyterian and Reformed Churches

Under this general heading we are reprinting certain statements from Presbyterian and Reformed papers indicative of the impression made on sister churches by Dr. Coffin's election as Moderator of the 155th General Assembly. Their number could have been greatly increased especially if we had not confined ourselves to churches of a Presbyterian and Reformed type. It will be noted that the first two statements are from papers that circulate in churches with which we are carrying on union negotiations.

THE MODERATOR OF THE U.S.A. CHURCH

Under this heading the editor of the Southern Presbyterian Journal has the following to say concerning the election of Dr. Coffin. Attention is called to the fact that Dr. Dendy quotes in full the editorial that appeared in The Sunday School Times which has a wide circulation in all the evangelical churches. This editorial appeared in the July issue of the Southern Presbyterian Journal.

The action of the Northern Church in electing Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin as Moderator is a clear declaration that our convictions regarding the importance of sound doctrine do not carry weight in that Church.

Dr. Coffin has made his position clear in his writings. We choose to accept the Word of God, not Dr. Coffin's denials of the precious doctrines found therein. We are constrained to quote the Apostle John: "If there come any unto you, and

bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed: for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds."

Expressing as it does our conviction in this matter we quote herewith an editorial appearing in the June 26th issue of *The Sunday School Times* entitled "The New Moderator":

"Another ecclesiastical tragedy has been enacted before our eyes in the election of Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin as the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. In the May issue of *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, published before the 155th General Assembly, Editor Samuel G. Craig pointed out clearly what it would mean to the Church if Dr. Coffin were elected. Dr. Coffin was one of the original signers of the 'Auburn Affirmation,' which holds that five essential Scriptural doctrines need not be believed even by Presbyterian ministers. Since 1926 he has been president of Union Theological Semi-

nary of New York City, which, as Dr. Craig says, 'at least since 1917 . . . has been the leading modernist Theological Seminary in this country and the chief disseminator of German rationalistic criticism.' In a series of excerpts from Dr. Coffin's writings quoted in CHRISTIANITY TODAY one finds that he called the Virgin Birth of our Lord 'this unscriptural exaggeration'; and concerning the Atonement, he declares that 'certain widely used hymns still perpetuate the theory that God pardons sinners because Christ purchased that pardon by His obedience and suffering, and that 'Jesus on the way to Calvary' was 'feeling His way to His Father's will.' Is not this counting 'the blood of the covenant . . . an unholy thing,' and doing 'despite . . . unto the Spirit of grace?' (Heb. 10:29.) And what mockery is this in the face of Paul's charge to the Ephesian elders at Miletus 'to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood!' (Acts 20:28.) Much more could be said of the gravity of this step which has just been taken by the governing body of a Church that had such honorable beginnings. It must be a great grief to those within that communion who still believe the Word of God; and it is to be hoped it will arouse those who were lulled into thinking that all was well in that Church. This is fresh evidence that the time has long since come 'when they will not endure sound doctrine; but . . . shall . . . heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables' (II Tim. 4:3, 4). And it is a new warning to 'awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame' (I Cor. 15:34)."

THE SADDEST CHAPTER IN THE COLLECTION

Under this sub-head Dr. James D. Rankin, one of the best known ministers in the United Presbyterian Church, in the course of an extended review in the form of an article in the United Presbyterian (August 9th) of the book entitled "Liberal Theology: An Appraisal" has the following to say concerning Dr. Coffin's contribution to that volume under the heading "The Scriptures."

Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin, president of Union Theological Seminary, discusses the attitude of liberal theology to the Scriptures. His article like that of Dr. Van Dusen reveals very clearly the attitude of liberal theology toward the fundamentals of Christianity. Coming from a leading Presbyterian minister of such eminence it is to the reviewer the saddest chapter in the collection.

He says that "God has made two revelations of himself, one in nature and one through universal human experience, especially through the Hebrew race, which he chose as an organ of revelation, culminating in the great Figure whom we know as

Jesus Christ" (He refers again and again to Jesus as the "great Figure"). The Bible is the written record of the revelation made through human nature. The Old Testament is chiefly that given through the Hebrew people. These people did not suspect that they were being used by God for such a purpose, at any particular time, but centuries later they discovered it and wrote back into their history this fact. . . . He says "their earliest writings were speeches of the prophets" who lived in the eighth century, immediately preceding the Babylonian captivity. These were fragmentary and crude because the people were uneducated. During their 70 years captivity in Babylon they became better educated. Some became poets, philosophers. After they were returned to their ancestral land these poets, sages, priests, collected the ancient traditions, legends, laws and the crude speeches of the prophets and from these produced the Five Books of Moses, the Psalms and other poetic books, the historical and wisdom books and polished the crude prophecies and thus edited the Old Testament.

Exactly the same method was followed in the New Testament, though this collection was completed within two centuries. Dr. Coffin says, "Scholars have tried in vain to get behind the history of Jesus. It has been impossible to get exact records of his career or the precise words he spoke, but these compilers have interpreted his life through the impressions he made upon the two generations and the value they placed on his life."

"These editors," says Dr. Coffin, "both Old and New Testament, employed literary devices, used in their times, of putting on the lips of noted persons the views they wished to credit to them. Often times these persons had lived centuries earlier and the editors labored to catch the atmosphere of that earlier time with which to clothe the teachings which they were attributing to them. Sometimes whole books were ascribed to persons long dead, as Daniel and II Peter. Thus the Bible becomes a progressive revelation of God's revelation of himself through the Hebrew nation." True to the Wellhausen theory which he is illustrating Dr. Coffin says, "When the scholars have rearranged the Scriptures in logical sequence they present to us God's self-communication in a progressive revelation of himself to mankind."

"For Christians," says Dr. Coffin, "the ultimate authority is Christ. They see in this supreme 'Figure' God's supreme act in history. That 'Figure' impresses us today through the impression made upon the Christian church of the first century." The doctor says that "Liberals refuse to be limited to the Bible Revelation because it would obstruct free response to truth." He says that the most skillful writers have difficulty in expressing their own minds, to say nothing of the minds of others, therefore, "we must distinguish between the

revelation which God gives in deeds and in the written record made long after."

Space forbids further discussion of this "authoritative definition of liberal Christianity." These writers spread all of the way from the last ones discussed, who are nearest to historic Christianity down to stark Modernism, and this is the peril in accepting the teachings of those nearest evangelical Christianity. They all extol Jesus in matchless words and express their love for him as the ideal of all time but their language does not rise to as high a pitch as that of Rousseau, the great French infidel, and they are Christian ministers!

DR. HENRY SLOANE COFFIN

The following editorial appeared in the June-July issue of The Calvin Forum, organ of international Calvinism and ably edited by Dr. Clarence Bouma of the Christian Reformed Church. Dr. Bouma is professor of Ethics and Apologetics in Calvin Seminary.

No more striking exhibition of the sad state of affairs in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. could be furnished than the recent election to the General Assembly's moderatorship of Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin. Though the majority of Presbyterians are conservative (if not orthodox) in their thinking and in their practical life, and the majority of the ministers undoubtedly subscribe *ex animo* to the Westminster Standards, the leadership in this large denomination bearing the Presbyterian name is liberal. If Twisse and Rutherford, Baillie and Gillespie—those stalwarts of the Westminster Assembly—could have been present at the recent General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., how they would have stared with open-mouthed astonishment at the proceedings! Henry Sloane Coffin, the moderator, the spiritual head and leader for the next year, of the great Church of Charles Hodge and Benjamin Warfield! Dr. Coffin is President of Union Theological Seminary, the school which a half century ago renounced the authority of the General Assembly and went its own way to shield and uphold the incipient modernism of some of its teachers. Today everyone knows "Union" to be the most outspokenly liberal seminary. Dr. Coffin, moreover, is an Auburn Affirmationist. If Twisse would ask one of the commissioners to the 155th General Assembly at Detroit just what that meant, he would have to reply that he, with all signers of the Auburn Affirmation, holds the following fundamental truths of the Reformed Faith to be "non-essential": (1) The inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture; (2) The Virgin birth of Christ; (3) The vicarious atonement of Christ; (4) Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension; (5) The supernatural nature of Christ's miracles. . . .

NORTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

This is the title under which the Christian Beacon, edited by the Rev. Carl McIntire, in its issue of June 3, indicated the significance it attaches to the election of Dr. Coffin as Moderator. As was to be expected, this organ of the Bible Presbyterian Church, not without warrant, sees in Dr. Coffin's election confirmation of its own separatist position and utilizes it to urge others to leave the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

The election of Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin as moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. climaxes in as glorious a way as possible the complete victory of the modernists in that church. Nothing could symbolize it any more perfectly. The church deliberately and wilfully, with Dr. Coffin's theological position clearly before it, voted to elect such a man, with such views, to be its leader in this hour. . . .

The enemies of the cross have ways of emphasizing their victories just as Hitler has repeatedly done in regard to the present world crisis. In the same place where the armistice of 1918 was signed, Hitler made the French sign on the dotted line their surrender.

When the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church tried the late Dr. Charles Briggs of Union Seminary, N. Y., for heresy and suspended him from the denomination because he doubted the inerrancy of the Scriptures, Union Seminary protested and withdrew from the denomination. Thus in a masterly, strategic fashion, and yet in a tragically disastrous reality, the president of Union Theological Seminary, whose views concerning the Scriptures are far more extreme and radical than those held by Dr. Briggs, is now honored by being elected to the highest position the Presbyterian Church is able to confer upon any man. The church has changed. The Word of God has not changed. The position the church took concerning the inerrancy of the Scriptures in 1893 was right, and the position the church now takes in honoring a man who denies the inerrancy of the Scriptures is wrong. . . .

Dr. Samuel G. Craig has helped to demonstrate the hopelessness of the situation and also to emphasize the completeness of the victory of the modernists in bringing these facts before the Assembly before it voted. We wonder what he is going to do—remain in fellowship with this? What are other Presbyterians going to do who really believe the Bible? Some of them did not see clearly the issues of the Independent Board in the judicial decisions of 1936, though the issues were most clear in the actual decisions themselves. But surely they can see this! The whole issue of the purity of the church, the commands of God's Word, the holiness of our God and of His Christ confront every true believer, and he must in obedience face them. In regard to a church so dominated and so controlled the one command of Scripture is separation from such an unequal yoke!

APOLOGETES FOR A MODERNIST CHURCH

The import of Dr. Coffin's election as seen by The Presbyterian Guardian, organ of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, finds expression in the following editorial which appeared in its issue of July 25. We could wish that there were less warrant than there is for its contention that the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in its corporate capacity is not witnessing to historic Christianity and that evangelicals within the Church are not doing what they might to remedy the situation.

Certain evangelicals within the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. have lifted their voices to attempt to explain and to rationalize the election of the Rev. Henry Sloane Coffin, D.D., LL.D., to the moderatorship of that church. Apparently they feel that this is one event which cannot be totally ignored nor remain unexplained to their following and to the thousands of Christians who have looked upon that communion with doctrinal suspicion.

An editorial writer for *The Presbyterian*, the Rev. David DeForrest Burrell, D.D., whom we have known for years as an evangelical and whose father was a voice of thunder against unbelief, comments in the June 3, 1943, issue, "From the point of view of this conservative writer, we have nothing to fear from the election of Dr. Coffin. He is a Christian gentleman of unusual fairness of mind, a man whose personal convictions, as evidenced by his words written and spoken, are, as the years pass, steadily moving in the right direction; and he may be, in the Providence of God, used to draw Union Seminary with him, as he hopes to draw it."

If the issue involved were not so deadly serious, true believers in the Word of God would find Dr. Burrell's words laughable. Dr. Coffin may be a gentleman with fairness of mind but to praise him as one with a leaning toward orthodoxy and with a desire to make Union Seminary evangelical is too much, we believe, even for Dr. Coffin to take seriously. . . .

Another evangelical in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the Rev. John Tallmadge Bergen, D.D., has rationalized the election of Dr. Coffin in a rather ingenious way. In a letter to the *Minneapolis Star-Journal* he writes, "Also, stories and some newspapers (not yours) have claimed that the Presbyterian church U.S.A. has 'gone liberal' because the moderator is president of Union Theological Seminary of New York and has been counted among the liberal theologians of our church. The moderator of the general assembly is only its presiding officer for its session. When its May and June meeting ends (as it has), the assembly dissolves until next May, unless the requisite number of presbyteries all over the United States demand a special meeting. Meanwhile there is no assembly and no moderator. He is called 'the moderator of the last assembly.' He has no doctrinal authority whatever. Presbytery only, ruled by the 'confession of faith,' has authority."

Everyone acquainted with Presbyterian government knows that a moderator is only the presiding officer of a particular assembly and that he has no "doctrinal authority." Theoretically he should preside over one assembly and with that his office should cease, which is true in most Presbyterian churches. But in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. the moderator of the last assembly becomes a member of the general council, and in a semi-legal fashion is for all practical purposes the chief official of the church. He issues statements on sundry questions and presumes, at least, to speak for the denomination.

The real import of the election of Dr. Coffin is not his lack of doctrinal authority but the fact that he is an expression of the will of the majority of that assembly and, we believe, the will of the majority of that church. No candidate's views were better known than Dr. Coffin's, for he is no obscure figure in the denomination. CHRISTIANITY TODAY as well as other papers had been circulated widely and far in advance of the assembly, condemning his doctrines as contrary to the standards of the church. Every commissioner, no matter how humble or obscure, had had an opportunity to judge of the fitness of Dr. Coffin for the highest office of the denomination. And yet, in the face of this, he was elected by an overwhelming majority. Here is first-hand evidence not only of the stranglehold of unbelief but also of the fact that the church as a whole is unwilling to do anything about it.

Why do we dwell on this unpleasant subject? Certainly we have no argument with Dr. Coffin as an individual and have no desire to persecute him personally. Our sole aim is to show that the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is under the control of those who deny the faith and that the church in its corporate capacity is no longer testifying to the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our debate with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., we emphasize, in the past and now, is not alone over those doctrines which are peculiar to Presbyterianism. Our first fight is over the basic doctrines of Christianity common to historic Protestantism. We have stuck to that principle and we shall continue to hammer home the truth that the denial of genuine historic Christianity caused the departure of hundreds from that church in 1936 and is continuing to make the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. spiritually impotent. To those evangelicals still in that denomination we ask, "How much more evidence do you need before you will leave that church or make an attempt through the presbyteries and the general assembly to revolutionize its testimony?" We are driven to the conclusion that the evangelicals in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. have been lulled into spiritual sleep and are indifferent to their duty in the light of this deplorable doctrinal decadence and Christ-dishonoring condition.

Doctor Coffin as a Candidate for Moderator

What follows including the excerpts from Dr. Coffin's writings is reprinted from our pre-Assembly number (May). Inasmuch as this number is being given much wider distribution—it is being sent to all our pastors among others—we have thought it advisable, with apologies to our regular readers, to include it in this number. As our May number was sent by first class mail to all the commissioners to the last Assembly some ten days preceding their meeting in Detroit, this will at least serve to make clear to everybody that it was not in ignorance of who Dr. Coffin is and the things for which he stands that they elected him as their Moderator. Including it in this number has also saved us from any need of saying more about the matter than we have said in our report of the Assembly. It is reprinted exactly as it appeared in our May number. No other statements by Dr. Coffin of which we have knowledge—not even his pre-Assembly effort to tell what Christianity is or his Assembly Sermon on Romans 8:34—contain anything opposed to what finds expression in the excerpts cited.



HE first and if we mistake not, the most significant duty that will confront the commissioners to the 155th General Assembly when they convene at Detroit on May 27th, will be the election of a Moderator. Ordinarily that would not be the case. As a rule it has been a matter of relatively small significance whether this one or that one of the men nominated was elected. That it is otherwise this year is due to the fact that a determined effort is being made to elect Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin—outstanding Auburn Affirmationist and President of Union Theological Seminary of New York—as Moderator of the approaching Assembly.

The campaign to elect Dr. Coffin was opened formally on January 11th last when the Presbytery of New York on motion of its Moderator, Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell, adopted the following resolution:

"That the standing rule which places the election of commissioners to the General Assembly in the April meeting be suspended, that the standing rule which requires three years to elapse between the election of a person as a commissioner and another election be suspended, and that Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin be elected commissioner to the 155th Assembly."

It was necessary to suspend the second of the standing rules mentioned because Dr. Coffin had been a commissioner to the 1941 Assembly. Inasmuch as Dr. Coffin was again elected a commissioner at the April meeting of New York Presbytery to conform to the provision of the Form of Government which provides that commissioners be elected "at the last meeting immediately preceding the meeting of the General Assembly, provided there be a sufficient interval between that time and the meeting of the Assembly," it seems clear that the purpose of suspending the first of the standing rules mentioned and in electing Dr. Coffin as a commissioner at the January meeting of Presbytery was to get his name before the Church as a candidate for the Moderatorship at an early date. Since Dr. Coffin's candidacy was first announced, an active campaign by means of newspapers, letters and personal interviews has

been carried on to further his election.

Inasmuch as there is every reason to expect that Dr. Coffin will be nominated for the office of Moderator at the coming Assembly, it seems fitting that certain matters bearing on his qualifications for this position be brought to the attention of the Church. In undertaking this task, we are not presuming to tell the commissioners how they should vote. We trust however they will not take it amiss—we are thinking more particularly of the elder commissioners—if we call their attention to some of the more significant things about Dr. Coffin which, if we mistake not, they will want to take into consideration in deciding whether to cast their vote for him. Nothing is further from our thought than to bring a railing accusation against Dr. Coffin. Unquestionably he is a man of high purpose and of outstanding gifts, not the least of which are a pleasing personality and unusual facility of expression in speech and writing. Some, we suspect, will find in the matters we are about to relate reasons why Dr. Coffin should be elected. We do not conceal the fact that we hope that most will think otherwise.

If Dr. Coffin is nominated for the office of Moderator of the 155th General Assembly, as seems certain, it will not be the first time he has been a candidate for this high office. He was a candidate in 1941. What is more, he came close to being elected as evidenced by the fact that he received 404 votes as compared with the 461 received by the successful candidate, Dr. Herbert Booth Smith. There is reason to believe, however, that on that occasion some voted for him in ignorance of who he was and the things for which he stood as little or no pre-Assembly publicity had been given to his candidacy. There is also reason to believe that a considerable number voted for him fearing that Dr. Smith was an Isolationist. Those who attended the St. Louis Assembly will recall that before the election an article appeared in a leading St. Louis newspaper alleging that such was the case. As a result it looked for a while as if the contest for the Moderatorship would be a contest between the Isolationists and Interventionists. Had that happened, it is quite certain that Dr. Coffin

would have been elected, as it was proved later that the membership of the Assembly was overwhelmingly anti-Isolationist. To counteract the influence of this newspaper statement, Dr. Charles R. Erdman in nominating Dr. Smith expressly denied that this allegation had any basis in fact. Even Dr. Erdman's assurance however, did not wholly remove the fear engendered by the newspaper article. It is believed that quite a number voted for Dr. Coffin who, if the Isolationist issue had not been raised, would have voted for Dr. Smith.

This paper has not been prepared in the interest of promoting the candidacy of any particular aspirant to the Moderatorship. It may be anti-Coffin but it is not pro-anybody else. Its sole or at least its main purpose is to direct attention to certain significant facts about Dr. Coffin that should not be overlooked in considering his candidacy for the Moderatorship of the 155th General Assembly.

1. The first of these facts is that Dr. Coffin is a signer of the Auburn Affirmation. It is true that there is precedent for electing an Auburn Affirmationist. Dr. William Lindsay Young was elected Moderator of the 1940 Assembly. Dr. Young, however, was a rank and file signer of the Auburn Affirmation, who previous to his election as Moderator was not widely known throughout the Church. Moreover, inasmuch as no reference was made to the doctrinal position of any of the six candidates nominated the year Dr. Young was elected, there is every reason to believe that few of the commissioners who voted for him were aware that they were voting to place an Auburn Affirmationist in the Moderator's chair. The situation is quite different as regards Dr. Coffin. He is one of the most widely known men in the Presbyterian Church. What is more, he was one of the original signers of the Auburn Affirmation and as such one of those who sponsored it when it was sent out to all the ministers of the Church, accompanied with an invitation to sign. It is highly probable that he had a hand in its composition and all but certain that it was not submitted to any considerable group of ministers before it had had his approval. It was one thing to elect Dr. Young as Moderator. It would be quite a different thing to elect Dr. Coffin.

It has been alleged that the Auburn Affirmation was merely a protest against the assumption that the Constitution of the Church can be amended by Assembly action without concurrent action on the part of the Presbyteries. If such were the case, it would be debatable whether such an assumption was involved in the doctrinal declarations of 1910, 1916, and 1923—their supporters denied it—but the Auburn Affirmation would have offered no evidence that its signers were doctrinally unsound. The Auburn Affirmationists however did not content themselves with affirming that the Constitution of the Church can be legally amended only by the concurrent action of the General Assembly and the Presby-

teries, and in asserting that a mere deliverance by the Assembly, or even a succession of Assemblies, is without binding authority. It went further, much further than that. It asserted that the doctrinal deliverances of the 1910, 1916 and 1923 Assemblies had to do with non-essential doctrines—doctrines that need not be believed even by Presbyterian ministers. That our readers may have before them the doctrines which the Auburn Affirmationists branded as non-essential, we cite what the three Assemblies mentioned affirmed:

1. It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scripture as to keep them from error.

2. It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that our Lord Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.

3. It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that Christ offered up himself a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and to reconcile us to God.

4. It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, that on the third day he rose from the dead with the same body with which he suffered, with which he also ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of God, making intercession.

5. It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God as the Supreme standard of our faith that our Lord Jesus Christ showed his power and love by working mighty miracles. This working was not contrary to nature, but superior to it.

So far is it from being true that the Auburn Affirmation confined itself to questions of a constitutional nature that, not content to affirm that these deliverances concerned themselves with non-essential matters, it presented a doctrinal statement of its own. That statement reads as follows:

"We all believe from our hearts that the writers of the Bible were inspired of God; that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh; that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and through Him we have our redemption; that having died for our sins He rose from the dead and is our ever living Saviour; that in His earthly ministry He wrought many mighty works, and by his vicarious death and unfailing presence He is able to save to the uttermost."

It is not surprising that this doctrinal statement, expressed so largely in the language of Scripture, is often cited as evidence that the Auburn Affirmationists are doctrinally sound. Taken by itself and without regard to its context, it might be regarded as inadequate but hardly as heretical. So to take it, however, is to misinterpret it. It must in the nature of the case be interpreted so as not to contradict their contention that the doctrines mentioned in the deliverances are non-essential doctrines. Hence such belief as they profess in the inspiration of the Bible must be consistent with the belief that it contains errors; such belief as they profess in Christ as God manifest in the flesh must be consistent with disbelief in His virgin birth; such belief as they profess in Christ as One who died for our sins must be consistent with rejection of the notion that He "offered

up Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and to reconcile us to God"; such belief as they profess in the continuing life of Christ, must be consistent with the belief that the body in which He suffered turned to dust; and such belief as they profess in Christ as One Who in His earthly ministry wrought many mighty works must be consistent with the denial that He wrought any miracles.

The Auburn Affirmationists are particularly explicit in denying that the writers of the Bible have been kept from error. The doctrine of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, they assert, "impairs their supreme authority for faith and life and weakens the testimony of the Church to the power of God unto salvation through Jesus Christ." How they reconcile such denial with their ordination vows in which they affirm that they believe "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice" we do not profess to understand. Be that as it may, they do affirm that to teach that the writers of the Bible were kept from error is not only false but harmful.

It should not be overlooked that the doctrines which the Auburn Affirmationists regard as non-essential are doctrines which are not only clearly taught in the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of our Church, but doctrines which have always been regarded as essential by all branches of the Christian Church. In the words of the late Dr. C. W. Hodge: "Whatever may be said as to the right of an Assembly to make any binding doctrinal declarations, the fact is that the plenary inspiration (and hence the inerrancy) of the Scriptures, the Virgin birth and bodily resurrection of Christ, His substitutionary atonement by which He rendered a satisfaction to Divine justice, and His personal return, are not only explicitly affirmed in the Westminster Confession, but are also essential to that common Christianity adhered to by the Romish, Greek, Lutheran and Reformed Churches, and essential to the Christianity of the New Testament."

It is sometimes alleged, by way of extenuation, that many of those who signed the Auburn Affirmation did so without perceiving its full significance. Whatever truth there may be in this allegation—we have reason to believe there is considerable—it can hardly be urged in behalf of Dr. Coffin in view of the position of leadership he has occupied among the Auburn Affirmationists from the beginning. Moreover quite apart from the fact that Dr. Coffin was one of the original signers of said Affirmation, we have abundant evidence in his writings that his views are in full harmony with its assertions. Some of this evidence may be found in the excerpts from his writings which follow this article.

It was alleged by some of those electioneering for Dr. Coffin in St. Louis in 1941 that he had altered his views in the direction of orthodoxy since the Auburn Affirmation was issued in 1924, and hence that the fact that he had signed it should no longer

be held against him. How little warrant there was for this allegation was evidenced by what happened to the Cedar Rapids overture of 1941 when it was committed to the Committee on Bills and Overtures of which Dr. Coffin was the chairman. That overture as presented by the Presbytery of Cedar Rapids read as follows:

"Whereas, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., has deemed it wise to declare itself in a 'didactic, advisory, and monitory' manner concerning the essential truths involved in the ordination vows to which ministers and elders subscribe, and

Whereas, the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. are substantially identical with our standards, and

Whereas, it is the hope and prayer of our denomination that these two great branches of the Presbyterian Church might once again be organically united in the service of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and

Whereas, we believe that this will be a step toward bringing the two denominations together;

Therefore, the Presbytery of Cedar Rapids, meeting in Mount Vernon, Iowa, on April 28, 29, 1941, respectfully overtures the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, in May, 1941, to declare that it regards the acceptance of the infallible truth and the divine authority of the Scriptures, and of Christ as very and eternal God, who became man by being born of a virgin, who offered Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God, Who rose from the dead with the same body with which He suffered, and Who will return to judge the world, as being involved in the ordination vows to which we subscribe."

The Cedar Rapids Overture, as rewritten by the Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Coffin, and as adopted by the General Assembly on his motion, reads as follows:

"The General Assembly recognizing that the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in the United States are substantially identical with our standards, expresses the hope and prayer that these two great branches of the Presbyterian Church may once again be organically united in the service of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This General Assembly reaffirms the fidelity of the Church to its doctrinal standards and declares itself convinced that its ministers and elders are loyal to their ordination vows, and we believe that the God of our fathers, who used them abundantly in winning the liberties, shaping the institutions and laying the spiritual foundations of this nation, is calling the inheritors of their convictions in this urgent day to witness in a re-united Church to the truths of the Gospel of Christ, on which alone a just and fraternal commonwealth can be reared, and which are the only hope for a world of righteousness and peace."

A comparison of the Overture in its original form and as rewritten by the Committee shows that while both express the hope that the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches may be re-united, they embody contradictory judgments relative to the Auburn Affirmation. To have adopted the Overture in its original form would have been to reaffirm in substance the deliverances of the 1910, 1916 and 1923 Assemblies, and hence would have involved a rebuke of the Auburn Affirmationists. As rewritten by the Committee however, it exonerates them by declaring

that the General Assembly is "convinced that its ministers and elders are loyal to their ordination vows" despite the fact that among the former there are still living approximately eight hundred who signed the Affirmation—only three of whom are known to have publicly withdrawn their signatures.

If Dr. Coffin no longer held the doctrinal views expressed in the Auburn Affirmation, he had a "made-to-order" opportunity to tell the Church of that fact in connection with the Cedar Rapids Overture. All he had to do was to recommend its approval in its original form. He used that opportunity, however, to reassert, in effect, his hostility to the Assembly deliverances of 1910, 1916 and 1923 and to obtain an Assembly deliverance favorable to the Auburn Affirmationists—so little warrant was there for alleging that his attitude toward the doctrines opposed by the Auburn Affirmation had changed.

A word may be permitted in passing concerning the probable effect of Dr. Coffin's election as Moderator, upon the proposed reunion with the Southern Presbyterian Church. What the Cedar Rapids Overture asked the Assembly to declare to be "involved in the ordination vows to which we subscribe" is expressed in exactly the same words as were employed by the Southern Presbyterian Assembly in 1939 (repeated in effect in 1940) in expressing what they conceive to be involved in these ordination vows. There is no reason to think that Dr. Coffin's election would place any additional difficulties in the way of union with the Episcopal Church (which he favors on the basically un-Presbyterian terms proposed) as it is professedly a comprehensive Church that tolerates all sorts of doctrinal beliefs. It is quite otherwise, however, with the Southern Presbyterian Church. No doubt there are within that Church those who would welcome union on terms acceptable to the Auburn Affirmationists but there is no reason to think that that is true of the Church as a whole. The election of Dr. Coffin, if we mistake not, would greatly retard, if it would not altogether prevent, union with the Southern Presbyterian Church in anything like the near future.

2. In the second place, Dr. Coffin is president of Union Theological Seminary of New York City—a position he has occupied since 1926. Since Union Theological Seminary has long been professedly an interdenominational, not a Presbyterian, institution, it follows that Dr. Coffin's main interest for the last seventeen years, has been outside the Church of whose Assembly he would now fain be Moderator.

Recall if you will, the history of Union Theological Seminary. It was founded as a Presbyterian Institution in 1836, but independent of any ecclesiastical control, and operated as such until it entered into the Agreement of 1870 which provided that it make annual reports to the General Assembly and that the election of professors by its Board be subject to veto by the General Assembly, as in the case of Princeton and the other Seminaries of the church. This Agree-

ment remained in effect until 1892, when Union Seminary asked that it be annulled—the occasion of this request being that the Assembly had declined to approve the election of Dr. Charles A. Briggs as professor of Biblical Theology because his views were judged heretical—and when the Assembly declined to be a party to the breaking of the Agreement this Seminary took matters into its own hands and terminated the Agreement on the ground that either party to the Agreement had the right to act alone in its abrogation, despite the fact that the General Assembly claimed that "no such right is expressed in the Agreement, and in the nature of things, no agreement where valuable interests are involved and valuable considerations are given and received, can in good morals be abrogated by one party to the Agreement without the consent and against the expressed desire of the other party." The "valuable considerations given and received" referred to were the large sums of money which Union Seminary had received during the twenty-two years it was under Assembly control—monies which had been given with the understanding that it was definitely connected with the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. Against the judgment of many, the General Assembly decided not to enter into a contest in the Civil Courts concerning the funds which in its judgment Union Seminary was using in a manner "not in accord with the intention of the donors" but to "leave the whole matter to the honor and stewardship of those now in charge of the Seminary." If it was thought that this appeal to the honor of the Board of Directors of Union Seminary would lead to the surrender of those funds, the event proved that the thought was a mistaken one. They are still part of the Institution's property or endowment. Immediately following the action of Union Seminary in abrogating the Agreement or Compact of 1870, the General Assembly disavowed all responsibility for its teachings, declined to receive its reports and enjoined its Board of Education from giving aid to any student who attends it—acts which still stand.

Following its repudiation of Assembly control, Union Seminary traveled rapidly in the direction of becoming an out-and-out modernist institution—so rapidly in fact that before the time of his death, Dr. Briggs was looked upon at Union Seminary as very much of a Conservative. At least since 1917, when Dr. A. C. McGiffert became its President, it has been the leading modernist Theological Seminary in this country and the chief disseminator of German rationalistic criticism. It has been alleged that the situation has been greatly improved at Union Seminary since Dr. Coffin became its President in 1926. We are not concerned to deny that there is a measure of truth in this allegation, but in as far as it is true, we think it is due mainly to the fact that there has been a widespread reaction against modernism and all it stands for even among the modernists

themselves. But while there has been a widespread recognition of the bankruptcy of modernism, this does not mean that there has been a general return to Biblical orthodoxy—at least not at Union Seminary. This has been made abundantly clear in a recent volume entitled "Liberal Christianity" (1942) written in honor of a recently retired professor of Union Seminary, Eugene William Lyman, in which six of the sixteen articles have been written by men now connected with Union Seminary and all of which are by men in sympathy with its theological position. Excerpts from Dr. Coffin's article in this volume, entitled "The Scriptures" will be found on another page. The most that Dr. H. P. Van Dusen, Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Seminary has to say of our Lord in his article "The Significance of Jesus Christ" is that "in Jesus of Nazareth God Himself was as fully present as it is possible for Him to be present in a human life"—a statement that will meet with the approval of many Unitarians. Such warrant as there is for thinking that Union Seminary has markedly improved rests largely, if we mistake not, on the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr, especially his recent Gifford Lectures, but while Niebuhr's writings are a vast improvement over what we have been accustomed to have emanate from Union Seminary, even he is still far short of Presbyterian orthodoxy. It is plain for instance from his latest book (The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1943, Vol. II), that he regards the Westminster doctrine of the Bible as tantamount to bibliolatry, the doctrine of the second coming of Our Lord as merely a symbol of the idea that "history's incompleteness and corruption is finally overcome," and the doctrine of the resurrection as merely a symbol of "the eternal significance of this historical existence." However, even if Dr. Niebuhr were much more orthodox than his writings indicate, it would still be true that the main bulk of the teaching at Union Seminary is unblushingly modernist and as such flatly hostile to the teaching of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The claim that Union Seminary under Dr. Coffin is becoming more orthodox has not been strengthened by its recent election of two new professors—Dr. John C. Bennett of the Pacific School of Religion and Dr. John Knox of the University of Chicago and editor of its modernist monthly, published under the name of "The Journal of Religion."

It is the President of this Seminary who is now being put forward as a candidate for the moderatorship of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.—a Seminary for whose teachings our Church has disavowed all responsibility for more than fifty years. Is the record of this Seminary such that the General Assembly should honor her President by electing him to the highest honor within her gift? Our Church has under her control ten Seminaries, not one of whose present heads has been so honored. It seems to us, at least, that if our Church wants to honor thus a Seminary President rather than a working

pastor it should honor one of these rather than the President of an outside institution whose teachings are in open hostility to her standards. That apart, is it fitting that one whose chief work for some seventeen years has been outside the Presbyterian Church, and who sets such small value on his Presbyterianism (see concluding excerpt), should be chosen the Moderator of the coming Assembly?

We have called attention to two considerations which it seems to us should preclude Dr. Coffin from being elected the Moderator of the approaching Assembly. It is still being said—in conversation if not in public speech—that Dr. Coffin has changed, that he is now very much of a returned prodigal and that by-gones should be treated as by-gones. In the course of what has been written above we have called attention to certain matters which indicate that there is no sufficient warrant for this judgment. Even if this representation were true, however, it must be evident to all that his attitude is altogether different from that of the prodigal of the Gospel story. So far from saying with the prodigal of the Gospel story, "Make me as one of thy hired servants," he is saying rather, "Make me the president of the corporation" or, perhaps it would be better to say, since the father of the Gospel prodigal was evidently a large farmer, "Make me the manager of the estate."

More might be said relative to Dr. Coffin as a candidate for the moderatorship—about the doings, for instance, of New York Presbytery during the last twenty-five years under the leadership of Dr. Coffin and those in sympathy with him—but to say more, it seems to us would be either useless or superfluous—useless as far as those are concerned who think that the fact that Dr. Coffin is the Church's outstanding Auburn Affirmationist and the President of Union Theological Seminary, commends him for the position, and superfluous as far as those are concerned upon whom these facts have exactly the opposite effect. Our purpose is not so much to persuade or dissuade as to do what we can to bring it about that all who are qualified to vote at the Detroit Assembly are made aware of the facts to which attention has been called. If knowing these facts the Commissioners to the 155th General Assembly elect Dr. Coffin as their Moderator, we will see in that action additional evidence of the triumph of liberalism and doctrinal indifferentism in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. If knowing these facts the Commissioners to the 155th General Assembly do not elect Dr. Coffin as their Moderator, we will see in their action evidence that the rank and file of the ministers and elders of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. are still devoted to the Gospel of the Grace of God as expressed in its Confession of Faith and Catechisms and as exemplified in the lives of their Presbyterian forbears—God-centered, self-sacrificing but strong and rugged lives which served well their age and generation.

Excerpts from Dr. Coffin's Writings

In selecting excerpts we have confined ourselves to what Dr. Coffin has written since the year in which he was elected President of Union Seminary. None have been taken from "Religion Yesterday and Today" (1940) because, contrasting as it does the beliefs of one era with those of another, it is more or less impossible to tell to what degree he identifies his own beliefs with those he describes. Be that as it may, the book offers no evidence contradictory to that embodied in the excerpts chosen.

The Bible

THE New Testament contains various doctrinal interpretations of the faith—half a dozen views of the atonement and several explanations of the origin of the Person of Christ." ("Why I Am a Presbyterian," *The Forum*, March, 1926.)

"The relatively greater freedom with which we handle the Bible, not hesitating to distinguish sub-Christian from Christian elements, the less from the more valuable experiences enshrined in this volume, and to discriminate between the religious experience and the form in which it is pictured, enable us to use each for what it is worth and to make these ancient discoveries of God accessible to modern men and women." ("*What to Preach*," 1926, p. 41.)

"Liberal Christians distinguish between the revelation which came in events and in the experiences of those redeemed by them, and the literary accounts in which this revelation had been preserved and transmitted. The authors and compilers of the biblical books often had a variety of traditions, legends and writings before them, and they edited these for their purpose, which was not primarily to convey historical information, but to declare God's message to their contemporaries through these memories of the nation's past. They employed literary devices, usual in their time, such as putting into direct discourse on the lips of their characters the points of view for which they were reported to have stood, or even writing an entire book in the name of a revered figure of a bygone day. Daniel and the Second Epistle of Peter are examples of this practice. The purpose of the authors and editors is to communicate God's mind. If a writing does not give an accurate account, according to modern historical perspective, of the thought and life of the past age which it describes, it gives the revelation to the writer's generation, to whom God was speaking as truly as He had spoken to his people centuries before. The most skilful men of letters have difficulty in adequately expressing their minds and God's revelation must not be identified with its record published by his spiritually gifted interpreters. . . . Liberalism is opposed to external authority because it obstructs free response to truth; and the liberal Christians have examined carefully the nature of the authority of the Bible. Tradition declares it verbally inspired and inerrant. This claim was made, however, for the original manuscripts as they came from their authors, and these are irrecoverable. No man can pronounce a book without error unless he claims omniscience for himself, and verbal inspiration cannot be asserted of a collection of writings which frequently contain divergent accounts of the same incident or utterance. The Protestant Reformers did not regard the Bible as an external authority. . . . The Gospels conclude with the promise of Jesus to be with his Church in his spirit. His followers are not under a law prescribed long ago, but under a present Leader. . . . And the Spirit's contemporary guidance frees Christians from any shape of things past, and keeps them advancing under his inspiration to create with him the diviner shape of things to come." (Article, "The Scriptures," in *Liberal Christianity*, 1942, pp. 231, 234 and 236.)

Virgin Birth

"My own country is in the throes of a belated theological controversy due to the persistence of an obsolete and unprotestant view of Biblical inerrancy. Like most controversies, it has focused on a single point, the Virgin birth of our Lord, which Fundamentalists hold to be essential to a faith in His Divinity. Simple expository preaching, showing what the New Testament teaches and where its emphasis lies, seems the corrective to this unscriptural exaggeration. . . . It becomes apparent that in the New Testament there are four explanations of the origin of our Lord's divine power: the anointing with the Spirit at the Baptism, the miraculous birth of the spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the spiritual ancestry reaching back in one genealogy through David to Abraham and in another to Adam, 'the son of God,' and the

eternal existence of the Word with the Father who became flesh or the Man from heaven existing in the form of God who emptied Himself to assume a servant's form and be made in the likeness of fleshly men. One cannot argue too much from silence, but one may point out that no New Testament writer combines pre-existence and miraculous birth, which apparently are, to start with, two different explanations of our Lord's uniqueness." (*What to Preach*, 1926, pp. 31-32.)

The Atonement

"The revolt from various theories of the atonement has been due to their unchristian views of God. A father who had to be reconciled to His children, whose wrath had to be appeased or whose forgiveness could be purchased, is not the Father of Jesus Christ—the God in whom He believed and whose character He revealed in His teaching and whose nature was embodied in Himself. . . . Such a God freely forgives. Certain widely used hymns still perpetuate the theory that God pardons sinners because Christ purchased that pardon by His obedience and suffering. But a forgiveness that is paid for is not forgiveness. The God of the prophets and psalmists, the God and Father of Jesus' own teaching, forgives graciously all who turn to Him in penitence . . ." (*The Meaning of the Cross*, 1931, pp. 110 and 118.)

"In Jesus on the way to Calvary we see One who is governed by no external law. There are no rules of right and wrong which direct Him to this vicarious Self-offering. He is impelled by an inward spirit, and is feeling His way to His Father's will. Life is a series of adventures prompted by love. He finds guidance and inspiration in the experiences of His predecessors. He draws upon the religious heritage for His ideals. But He cannot follow them slavishly. He appraises them with His own moral judgment. He tests them; and amid perplexities and mental struggle He arrives at His own solution of God's purpose for Him. . . . There were times when He Himself was uncertain of His course. But as He lived loyally and daringly, He was led, and led surely." (*The Meaning of the Cross*, 1931, pp. 127 and 130.)

Miracles

"A fourth difficulty lies in the treatment of the miraculous. Most of us believe in a God who surprises us by doing wondrous things, so that we cannot confine Him within man's discoveries of His usual ways. But we realize that in Bible days men's outlook upon nature and history was so different from ours that we cannot accept their explanations as identical with our own. Some preachers discard altogether passages in which the miraculous is prominent on the ground that they do not feel intellectually honest in employing them. Others use them, but give the impression of being ill at ease with them. Others, again, to the bewilderment of some of their hearers, use them as though they were handling a matter-of-fact modern history. The pulpit is usually not the place to deal with the question of the historicity of the Biblical narrative. That can be done when necessary, more wisely in a less formal meeting where there can be discussion and the give and take of question and answer. In any case, the preacher is not urging his hearers to attempt to reproduce the miraculous experience in literal form, but he is trying to state the spiritual principle, illustrated by the Biblical account and to induce his listeners to live by it. . . . The modern preacher may not feel that he knows exactly what lies behind the tradition of many of the Bible miracles, but he knows that generations of believers have tested the spiritual laws which these narratives illustrate with incomparable vividness and power. Let him use them for that purpose, and make plain in his treatment of them that this is his dominant aim. The historic question of what actually happened and exactly how it happened will not be raised because it is lost in the religious question of finding an all-sufficient God for our present necessities, and working with Him for their fulfillment in accordance with our conceptions of His ways in nature and the soul of man." (*What to Preach*, 1926, pp. 38-40.)

An Essential Defined

"In current discussions a particular interpretation of the manner of Christ's birth, of the meaning of His cross, or of the mode of the resurrection, is often called 'essential' or 'a fundamental of Christianity.' It is well to notice that New Testament writers give various explanations of our Lord's origin, and death, and of His life thereafter. While it would be fallacious to argue that a writer is ignorant of an event, or does not accept an interpretation, which he fails to mention, still each was trying to present a whole Christ to his readers. He was not aware that he was contributing to a collection of writings, so that his omissions would be filled

in by others. We are, therefore, not justified in terming items, which several of them think unnecessary to include, 'fundamentals of New Testament Christianity.' What is essential is found in them all." (*The Portraits of Jesus Christ in the New Testament*, 1926, pp. 5-6.)

Presbyterianism

"I early learned by heart the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Divines, which is an excellent mental discipline in its logical reasoning and rhythmical English. Many of its formulations are obsolete, and I am not passing it on to another generation, but its purpose, to supply Christians with definite convictions and to make them think for themselves, is part of an inheritance worth striving to maintain. . . .

"I remain a Presbyterian, not because I believe the Presbyterian Church is better than any other, but because I owe to it whatever religious inspiration I possess and because I believe that in it for the present I, with my ancestry, training and temperament, can most usefully serve the Kingdom of God. . . .

"Ministers and other office-bearers are required to accept the Scriptures as the Supreme standard of faith and life and the Westminster Confession as containing the system set forth in the Holy Scriptures. Such subscription was not originally intended by the Westminster Divines, and I hope to see the day when it will no longer be required. . . .

"I am a Presbyterian in spite of certain tendencies which crop out in the Church from time to time. One is the notion that the Presbyterian Church is a denomination and not an attempt to embody the Catholic Church of Christ, and a denomination which is held together by agreement in theological opinions. . . . A second is the strict interpretation of the vow required of ministers and other office-bearers, in which they accept the Bible as the Word of God, 'the only infallible rule of faith and practice' and receive the Westminster Confession of Faith 'as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.' . . . I am a Presbyterian only temporarily. The name carries many hallowed memories and associations, but it seems to me to belong to the past rather than to the present. . . .

"It is not easy to discover the distinctive characteristics of our existing Protestant communions. The advantages which I have ascribed to the Presbyterian Church will all doubtless be claimed by others for their own churches. For nearly twenty-two years, on the Faculty of an interdenominational theological seminary [Dr. Coffin became its President shortly after this was written] I have tried to teach future ministers of all leading communions—Baptist, Congregational, Disciple, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, as well as Presbyterian—and I know that the work for which these men were preparing themselves is the same. Our denominational divisions do not stand today for differences in teaching or in type of life produced. There may be differences of emphasis but they are trifling. There are radical and reactionaries, high, low and broad churchmen in all communions and denominational lines are not real frontiers. Ministers have more in common with the clergy of other churches who have had an education similar to their own than with fellow-ministers of their own church with different training. Our people pass readily from a church of one communion to that of another. There are genuine differences—the difference between the infallible type who believe in an inerrant book or an inerrant pope and the experiential type who believe in the progressive leadership of the Spirit within. But these types are found side by side in every Protestant communion and to some extent even in Roman Catholicism." (*Why I Am a Presbyterian*, *The Forum*, March, 1926.)

Book Notices

INTO ALL THE WORLD. *The Great Commission: A Vindication and an Interpretation* by Samuel M. Zwemer. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 222 pages, \$2.00.

It is some six years since Dr. Zwemer wrote "Life Begins at Seventy." This volume makes clear that in the meantime nothing has happened to impair the vigor of his mind or his zeal for the cause to which he has devoted his life. Dr. Zwemer writes in his foreword: "An emasculated Christianity has no power of propaganda and no missionary passion. . . . So we have tried in this little book, in some small

degree, to weigh the overwhelming evidence for the genuineness of Christ's Great Commission and for the finality of His teaching. Three chapters deal with the place of Jesus Christ in the Old and New Testaments; five chapters with the Great Commission, its authority and implications; while the remaining chapters tell of apostolic aims, methods, dynamic, qualifications, message and call." This is a must book for every missionary library.

GREAT NIGHTS OF THE BIBLE. By Clarence E. Macartney. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, \$1.50.

This is Dr. Macartney's latest and possibly best book of sermons. Evangelical in content these sixteen sermons are marked by that insight, practical wisdom, aptness of illustration, and vigor and vividness of expression that have given him his unique place among the genuinely Christian preachers of America.

MORE THAN CONQUERORS. By W. Hendriksen. Baker's Book Store, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 283 pages, \$1.50.

While this is not a new book—it appeared in 1940—it only recently came into our hands. We are directing attention to it because it seems to us to contain a commentary on the whole of the book of Revelation of outstanding value. Written from the a-millennial viewpoint it not only combines real scholarship with simplicity of expression, but is conspicuously free of those fantastic interpretations so widely circulated. Those who find difficulty in understanding the last book of the Bible or who fail to derive from it the comfort and encouragement it was designed to provide the church militant will do well to secure this book.

SNOWDEN-DOUGLASS SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS FOR 1944. By Earl L. Douglass. The Macmillan Company. \$1.50.

This series of practical expositions of the International Sunday School Lesson were started in 1921 by Dr. James H. Snowden and continued by him until his death in 1936. Since that time they have been written by Dr. Douglass with increasing improvement in form and content. They have also grown in favor as evidenced by the fact that last year's edition was exhausted before the end of 1942. The inclusion of Dr. Douglass' name in the title is long overdue and is probably a first step toward calling them simply The Douglass Sunday School Lessons. They deal with the lessons under three heads: (1) an exposition of the text, (2) suggested questions and topics for discussion, and (3) hints to teachers. These expositions are sane throughout and not only informed by a correct conception of what Christianity is, but pervaded by an earnest desire to have others partake of its benefits. Whatever other helps Sunday School teachers of upper grade pupils may have they cannot afford to be without this book.

The Word of God and the Reformed Faith

This important book contains the addresses delivered at the Second American Calvinistic Conference held at Grand Rapids last June.

The titles and authors of the main addresses follow: The Glory of the Word of God, by Dr. H. J. Ockenga; What Is the Word of God, by Dr. Louis Berkhof; Present-Day Interpretation of the Word of God, by Dr. O. T. Allis; The Word of God and Philosophy, by Dr. H. J. Stob; The Word of God and Science, by Dr. John De Vries; The Word of God and Education, by Prof. T. E. Welmers, and the Word of God and Culture, by Dr. L. G. Wencelius.

The book also contains the more popular addresses made at the Fellowship Banquet, attended by some four hundred guests from all parts of the United States, dealing with the present-day outlook for Calvinism. Dr. William Crowe spoke on Calvinism and Tomorrow, Dr. Wencelius on Calvinism and France, Dr. Stephen Szabo on Calvinism and Hungary, and

Dr. John Van Lonkhuyzen on Calvinism in the Netherlands.

The Reformed Faith not only ascribes priority to God in all thinking and living, but acknowledges that for anything like an adequate knowledge of the sovereign God we are dependent on the Word of God as recorded in Scripture. Hence the general theme of the Conference.

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