

The Religious World

The Methodist General Conference

From a Special Correspondent

The first week of the session of the General Conference held in the city of Cleveland has made an interesting chapter in the history of this important branch of the universal Church. At the very beginning it found itself face to face with a most perplexing question, namely, the eligibility of women to seats in this legislative body. Four women had been duly elected, and were present to take their places. The vote that had been taken during the past year by the annual conferences upon the admission of women into the General Conference was decided adversely by eighteen votes. The eligibility of elected women being challenged by Dr. J. M. Buckley, a committee of thirty was appointed to consider the whole question of woman's eligibility to a seat in the Conference. The committee presented a majority and minority report, twenty sustaining the eligibility of the women, and eleven denying the same. The majority report claimed that it was simply a question of interpreting the Constitution of the Church admitting laymen to the General Conference, citing the fact that such interpretation was made in regard to the relation of woman to official positions in the local church.

The minority report, as also a majority of the members of the Conference, insisted that the Constitution would have to be changed in order to admit women to the Conference. Many who favored the women as delegates nevertheless held to this view, as the only legal method of procedure in the case. Three days were consumed in the discussion of this subject, which was very able on both sides of the question, and resulted in a compromise report, in which the subject was referred back to the annual conferences to be voted upon during the next year. Before this decision was reached the women had resigned their seats, as they stated, in the interest of harmony. There seems to be no doubt that the vote next year will exceed the necessary three-fourths.

It is significant that the German conferences stood, in this country, 12 for and 597 against women, in Europe 80 against and none for. No other nation or race stood so solidly together on either side of the question. One of the speakers during the discussion remarked that "the Methodist that did not fall in with this movement for women will be like the Indian who lassoed the first locomotive he ever saw, which was also the last he saw."

The entire Conference seems jubilant over the amicable settlement of this vexed problem, which threatened to seriously disturb the peace of the Church. The Bishops' address, which is similar to the President's message to Congress, was read by Bishop Warren, and took two hours for its delivery. It was a very comprehensive and thorough presentation of the growth of the Church during the past four years, its present status, and the outlook for the future. It embodies many suggestions on important questions, and recommendations as to needed legislation. On the matter of Christian union the address "breathes a very fraternal spirit," as the following indicates:

We devoutly thank God, with you, that we are in the most friendly relations with all other Churches. We believe that the intense longing of the heart of Christ, as expressed in his great high-priestly prayer, "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us," is being fulfilled. Our message of love means oneness of spirit. Though there are differences of operation, it is the same God who worketh all in all. We have always practiced these four great elements of Christian unity:

1. A recognition and acceptance of the members of every Evangelical Church on the presentation of letters of membership; and a commendation of our own members to other Churches.
2. A cordial welcome of members of other Churches to the Holy Communion of their Lord as administered by us, and a glad going to the communion of our Lord as administered by them.
3. A free and cordial exchange of pulpits.
4. A practical co-operation with other Churches in all Christian work. Our ideal is not organic union of churches, but fraternal union of spirit. And this we believe to be the only unity known to the Apostolic and post-Apostolic Churches.

While we rejoice in these blessed fraternal relations with all Churches of Christ, we especially appreciate and reciprocate all evidences of Christian fellowship and co-operation from our sister Methodist Churches throughout the world.

In addition to the above, the Conference received the overtures of the Commission on Federation of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, with hearty unanimity, and appointed a like Commission to co-operate with their Southern brethren. This looks toward a closer relation between these two Churches in the future.

The Bishops exalt Christian citizenship as worthy of the highest aspiration of the Church. The following vigorous expression is found in their address: "A man may be as much a

missionary of God in the politics of America as in the wilds of Africa." On the present-day socialistic questions, the address was both Christian and democratic, as the following indicates:

In the progress of our liberties and the widening of our development we have come upon perils unknown in the earlier periods of our history. Classes are arrayed against each other, with mutual misunderstandings. A ripple has come upon our shores from the far-off tidal wave of the French Revolution, declaring that all property is theft, that men may be as much enslaved by law as by force, deprived of their rights by trusts and combines as by arms. In these misunderstandings, and it may be great wrongs, the Church must not be silent. It is her very nature to defend and care for the poor. Like her Master, the Spirit of the Lord God is upon her to preach the Gospel to the poor. Peculiarly is this true of our Church. It began its ministry to the wretched prisoners in Britain, continued it among the poor colliers, has always sought the sorrowing, wretched, wandering, and lost. It has never pandered to the rich nor been silent at injustice.

In this seething discussion concerning the rights of property we think these positions are grounded on justice and right:

1. Every man has a right to acquire property by the legitimate means of activity, foresight, invention, and inheritance.
2. No man has a right to use his possessions to oppress his fellow-men.
3. Every man has a right to the profit of his own labor. In that respect he is a capitalist.
4. No man has a right to use his labor to oppress his fellow-men.
5. Every free man has a right to refuse to work for another.
6. No man has a right to prevent another from working when, and for whom, he will.
7. Every man is accountable to God for the use of his time, labor, and their outcome, wealth.

Never in the history of the Church were the interests of the working masses pressed upon her attention as now. Many memorials from different parts of the country have been presented, among them one from the New York East Conference, which is a very strong plea for the rights of the oppressed, and calls upon the Church to give answer to the appeal of the wronged. The following are the recommendations of this memorial:

1. The duty of intelligent and discriminating sympathy with the discontent and the aspirations of the poor.
2. The maintenance of the right of property.
3. The need of just co-ordination between the rights of individuals and the welfare of society, in the regulation of the employment of both capital and labor.
4. The duties of property, and the ethical principles of business.
5. The danger of caste spirit and plutocratic influence in the Church.
6. The duty of the Church, and especially of the ministry, to study the constitution and the needs of society, and intelligently to lead in the march of social reform.

While the organization of the Methodist Church is very generally regarded as one of the most perfect ecclesiastical machines in existence, there is, nevertheless, a strong demand for modification of many features of its government. The centralization of too great power is regarded as dangerous to the future of the Church. All legislative and judicial power is lodged in the General Conference, and all the executive power in the Board of Bishops. The sentiment is freely expressed that the government should be more largely democratic, granting larger liberty and power to the annual conferences and the local churches, the Conference having some of the home rule enjoyed by the Presbyterian Church in her Presbyteries, and the local church having an autonomy of its own similar to the Congregational churches—a form of government somewhat after the model of our Federal Nation, giving the States and municipalities the right, in all local affairs, to govern themselves, while federal authority is not impeached. It is in reality the old question of Americanism—home rule as against a too strongly centralized government. The General Conference has power to change or annul, with few exceptions, the whole Book of Discipline. Dr. Townsend, in his address in Chicago April 28, indicated some of the questions that were up before the Church at large for consideration for the modification of the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church:

Shall our laymen be admitted to the annual conference, and shall they have a more decisive voice in the General Conference?

Shall our stewards be elected by the assembled brotherhood of the laity, instead of being a self-perpetuating body whose election depends on the nomination of the pastor?

Shall our presiding elders be elected by the annual conference instead of being appointed by the Bishops?

Shall the arbitrary time-limit that often embarrasses the appointing power, the preacher, and the churches, be modified or removed?

Shall the undemocratic and disregarded rule forbidding negotiations between preachers and people as to appointments be enforced or abrogated?

Shall our discipline, without specifying certain prohibitions, leave all questions of casuistry, excepting, of course, any form of immorality, to the individual conscience of the members?

Shall the management of the secular and business enterprise of the Church continue in the hands of the ministers instead of being open equally to laymen who have business education and experience?

Shall the women of Methodism be permitted to exercise Church rights not yet recognized by the General Conference?

There is no denying that the progressive leading spirits of Methodism are demanding a more democratic government, with as much reason for it as the advanced Presbyterians desire

revision of their creed. Some modification is asked for regarding the office and work of a Bishop. No other ecclesiastical official has such tremendous power, and it is conceded that the Church assumes great risk when it places in the hands of few men such power. Dr. Buckley puts it thus: "The office of Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church is, under a few limitations, unparalleled in its power over men and churches. It is a most dangerous thing to put a man into that office." It is believed that the time has come when stronger safeguards should be placed about the work of the pastorate, and more specific responsibility placed upon the Bishops. It is proposed by some, as a remedy, to elect them for a certain number of years, making them eligible to re-election, thus giving the Church the opportunity to correct any mistakes it might make in the choice of the chief pastors.

A special committee has been appointed to consider the question of districting the Bishops, making them modified diocesan Bishops, with all the essential features of the general superintendency. It is thought that only by this method can the Bishop become sufficiently acquainted with the needs of the churches and the character of preachers to make the appointments intelligently. There are those who are loth to make any changes that seem to affect the general superintendency of the episcopacy, failing to recognize the fact that while Bishop Asbury might in reality be a bishop over the entire Church the conditions of the present time, as well as the largeness of the Church, make it impracticable and unwise to try to sustain an episcopacy such as was adapted to the early conditions of Methodism. The "General Conference Advocate" of May 6, in a very able article on "Needed Modifications in Our Episcopate," has this forcible sentence: "It is simply an inevitable and unavoidable result of our present system which requires each of our Bishops to be familiar with the ministers of the whole Methodist world. We make no claim to the infallibility of our Bishops, but we put upon them responsibilities which nothing short of infallibility could possibly meet." In the General Conference of 1888 the Committee on Episcopacy recommended, and the Conference passed, a resolution to district the Bishop; but just a little while before the adjournment of the Conference, when many of the delegates had left the seat of the Conference, the action was rescinded.

The Missionary Bishops, Taylor of Africa, and Thoburn of India, presented their reports on Friday, May 8. Bishop Taylor passed his seventy-fifth birth anniversary on Saturday, May 2, and the Conference passed congratulatory resolutions on the preservation of his long and useful life. His presence electrified the whole Conference, and the report of his work was received with manifest feelings of devotion for the St. Paul of modern missions. Bishop Thoburn's report mightily stirred the great Conference. It was the outlook of a mighty prophet, believing thoroughly in the salvation of this world through the Gospel of Christ. He closed his remarkable address with an outburst of eloquent portrayal of the speedy conquest of the heathen world, such as is seldom heard from human lips. As he closed, the writer heard a delegate say, "That's the St. John of Methodism." Few men have as strong a hold upon the heart of the Church as has the good Bishop.

The Standing Committee are all hard at work, and the results of their deliberations are awaited with eager anticipation by the Conference and the public.

B. F. D.

The Princeton Jubilee

The eighty-fourth anniversary of Princeton Theological Seminary, May 5, when a graduating class of seventy-six received their diplomas, was mainly devoted to celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the appointment of Professor William Henry Green as instructor in the Seminary. Even the personal interest which attaches to the venerable Professor, as the sole surviving link between the present Faculty and the original Faculty, composed of Samuel Miller, Charles Hodge, and Archibald and Addison Alexander, received less emphasis than the theological interest, which centers in him as the most distinguished defender of the Princetonian conceptions of the unity and authenticity of the Mosaic books, according to the traditional belief. This was the recurrent note of the sixteen addresses which held the attention and aroused the enthusiasm of great audiences, morning and afternoon. It was a noble celebration of the influential life-work of one of the great scholars of this century, respected alike for his simple conscientiousness and for his unsurpassed learning. It was almost amusing to hear that the young learner, on entering Lafayette College at the age of twelve, had begged to be excused from studying the languages, on the ground that he had no aptitude for it. Of many quotable sayings a few illustrate the general current of feeling and expression:

"On the issue between naturalism and supernaturalism," said Dr. Booth, Moderator of the General Assembly, "we have had on our side 'Athanasius

against the world.' We are content to rest our case on the authority of one whose word must be final, if any word can be."

Professor McCurdy, of Toronto, said: "Professor Green has been the most influential teacher of Hebrew in the English-speaking world of our time. But his greatest work has not been philological. He has been more than an expounder of the Word; he has been its exponent in the candor—the pure white light—of the love of truth and the truth of love."

Said Dr. William M. Paxton: "Dr. Green's character is made of solid blocks of granite. The storm of revision never shook it."

Dr. Cuyler related an anecdote of Professor A. A. Hodge. To a New Haven man he said, "Your trouble at Yale is that you teach your students to think. Our way at Princeton is to leave God to do the thinking, and to devote ourselves to believing."

President Patton remarked: "There is a short method in settling questions of criticism by help of a theory of inspiration which assumes that whatever is said about a book of Scripture in another book of Scripture is conclusive. This method does not require much learning, and the men who are given to it are not very learned. This is not Professor Green's method."

Professor Mead, of Hartford, said: "Differences in the conclusions of critics result from differences in their prepossessions. But there are right prepossessions and wrong ones. The name of the 'higher criticism' belongs as well to conservative conclusions as to radical. Dr. Green has made it certain that no one can be certain of a divided authorship of the ancient documents by internal evidence only."

Dr. Green, evidently with deep emotion, responded, the assembly rising and standing while he addressed them, until he bade them sit. He reviewed the past in a strain of simple remark, closing with an earnest protest against an "idea of inspiration which furnishes no guarantee for the truth of the Scriptures." Against this his critics, at least those who claim to be Christian, protest as earnestly as he. The difference between him and them is in the varying extension given to the undefined term, "the truth of the Scriptures." Once this was extended to cover all the chronology given in Scripture. But Dr. Green no longer extends it thus. The restricted extension, once begun, has no logical limit but the truth essential to godly character and salvation, and here the men of the spirit in all the schools are at one. Concerning the issue between naturalism and supernaturalism, insisted on at Princeton as most vital, it is noteworthy to find the Duke of Argyll, a name respected in Presbyterian circles, speaking thus in his latest book, "The Foundations of Belief." "The sacred writers of the Jews never admitted for a moment that irrational distinction, which is purely modern, between what we choose to call the natural and the supernatural." We seem to be nearing a point where the controversies of recent centuries are to be superseded by the incoming of a conception of God as related to the world of natural causes which shall include all the real truth for which the disputants on either side have stood. A fitting seal was set to the commemoration of Professor Green's work by the announcement of an undertaking to raise \$100,000 for the foundation of a memorial professorship.

The Death of the Shah and Missions in Persia

The New York "Tribune" of May 4 has a long and illuminating article on Missions in Persia. It treats of the effect of the assassination of the Shah on missions and missionary work in that country, and contains a long and admirable statement of what that work is and what has been achieved. The late Shah was a friend of the foreign missionaries. He was not a religious fanatic, but he extended to religious teachers full protection as long as they obeyed the law prohibiting the making of proselytes from among the Mohammedans. Christian work in that empire is chiefly in the hands of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, and the record of what has been accomplished reads almost like a romance. The outlook for the future was bright, but now the missionaries and their friends are filled with anxiety. It is said that the new Shah has neither his father's strength of mind nor his liberality of character, and that he is not likely to rise above the influence of the fanatics by whom he will be surrounded. The missionaries have been in Persia about sixty years, and have never been entirely free from the persecution of the Mohammedans. They have been protected, however, by the strong hand of the Government. Now that one unfavorable to them is likely to assume the throne, the outcome is not hard to predict. Another and hardly more favorable alternative remains. If the right of the succession is disputed, there will probably be civil war, in which the lives and property of the missionaries would be imperiled. In that case Russia might attempt to quell the disturbance and to assert her own supremacy, and her hostility to Protestant Christian missionaries is as pronounced as that of the Mohammedans. Those who have built up the work in Persia have reason for anxiety; indeed, the general missionary problem is becoming more and more complicated. At present there is but little difficulty in Africa, India, China, or Japan. In those countries Christians are not seriously opposed; but the terrible story of Turkey is still ringing in our ears when dreary forebodings come from Persia.

What Has Been Done in Persia

The most important mission stations in Persia at present are at Teheran, Tabriz, Hamadan, and Urumia. The most prominent of these is probably the last, where the mission extends its work