

THE ASSEMBLY.

At this writing the Assembly is not quite half through its sessions, and so we can only speak of what has been done up to this time. As to its membership it may be said that there are not a great many of the prominent leaders of the Church present. But it is made up of a good representative element. As this is recognized as distinctly a country church Assembly it would seem that the Presbyteries had that in mind in selecting their commissioners. It is probable that there are more men from the country in this Assembly than there have been before in recent years.

Thus far it can certainly be said that it is not a "one man Assembly." No leader has appeared, nor has there been any evidence that any one has tried to secure that position. The members are doing their own thinking.

Up to this time the business has been conducted with smoothness and dispatch.

Some important matters have been attended to. Others are under way.

One matter of interest and of gratification to the Assembly was the report of the Committee on Comity with the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. This dealt especially with the case of Rev. J. C. Barr and the Lafayette church in New Orleans. The important part of this report was not so much the disposition made of these and other special cases, as that it gives the agreement of the Northern Church in which it directs its Presbyteries to be very careful in the observance of the comity agreements between the two churches. It is felt that this action will result in the removal of any cause of friction between the two churches.

Another matter of great interest was Oglethorpe University. For some time there has been a considerable agitation in the Church as to the relationship of this new University to the Presbyterian Church. The discussion had waxed pretty warm in some parts of the Church, there being some who maintained that the University could not substantiate its claim to being a Presbyterian institution. A conference between the friends of Oglethorpe and those who were opposed to its receiving help from the churches, with the result that an agreement was reached which asked the Assembly to appoint a committee to report to the next Assembly on the relation of Oglethorpe to the Assembly.

The authorities of Oglethorpe have, from the beginning, expressed the desire to be in some vital relationship to the Church through the Assembly.

It is felt that the able committee appointed to consider this matter will be able to devise some plan which will accomplish the desired end so as best to advance the cause of Christian education.

TRAVELING.

There is the beginnings of a tramp in every man. Nations have caught the spirit of emigrating and have wandered far from their original home. There are said to be over one hundred thousand all-the-year-around tramps in the United States. These men are tramping not so much because of an opposition to steady work, as because they cannot stay in one place any length of time. The wanderlust seizes them and they must see new places. Americans are the greatest travelers in the world. Two hundred thousand are accustomed to cross the Atlantic ocean in normal times to visit the Old World. Millions upon top of millions of dollars are spent, so that the balance of trade is tipped against us in the course of the year, in spite of our tremendous exports. The trains, West and East, are crowded and one wonders where so many people are going, and what they are going for. The desire to see the world is upon men.

Traveling is a sequence of civilization. The safety of the traveler being secured, the man of civilized countries has a desire to learn more about the world in which we live. The uncivilized peoples do not travel far from their native soil—only the curse of war or famine drives them away. The hundreds of thousands of travelers who cross the seas and the deserts to learn more of the world are from the nations of highest culture.

Traveling is an education in itself. Nature stands with open volume in her hands, and the observant traveler can learn much that books do not teach him. The sum of human knowledge has been vastly increased by going to and fro in the earth.

Cain laid the foundation of his scientific knowledge when he went forth out of the alluvial plain to the Land of Nod. Abram gained more information of a geographic kind when he went to a land that he knew not of than all the inhabitants of Ur had gained in centuries.

Today the wonders of God's creation, the marvels of His providential dealings with mankind have been seen by the travelers as they scour the face of the earth.

Traveling has increased the comforts of life. Plants and products of other nations are brought home and great industries have their beginning in what one traveler has found in his visits to other nations. The inexhaustible supplies of food that God has provided for man are easily found. The rich products of one people are carried to another and the sources of life widened in their scope and use.

Traveling tends to bring the races of mankind together in one common fellowship. Sometimes it opens the door for greed and conquest, ordinarily it widens the views of men, increases their respect for other people, breaks down the wall of pride, leads men slowly to recognize the unity of the race. It was Paul who saw this great truth and Paul was the only one of the apostles who had more than a provincial knowledge of the world.

Traveling brings the universal kingdom of the Christ nearer—the tremendous needs of peoples across the seas and prepares and produces a highway for the King.

A. A. L.

THE UNDEMOCRATIC NATURE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT A REASON FOR ITS NON-AGGRESSIVENESS.

Government has far more to do with the development of a nation than we imagine. Dr. Peck used to say, "A people are no better than their government."

The trend of all government in the last hundred and twenty-five years has been toward a more democratic form. From despotism of the Caesars and their immediate successors the civilized world slowly moved toward an oligarchical form of government, seen in the rise and reign of lords and barons of the middle ages. The people were divided into two classes—one smaller, yet all-powerful; the other more numerous but powerless.

The last hundred years has seen the people slowly coming into their own—democracy has made a great progress.

This is seen in our country in the abolition of caste. The emancipation of the slaves, the industrial emancipation that is taking place all over our country. The direct primary, the referendum, recall and woman's suffrage are but straws showing the rapidity and trend of the current.

This trend is manifest even in the hide-bound countries of Europe. This strange spirit of the people, is difficult to work against. We may fool the people sometimes, but they cannot be

fooled all the time, and things that do not fail in line with this tendency will be thrown aside.

Like the glacier it moves slowly, but grinds the face of any opposing obstacle.

Another fact that is sadly apparent is that the Presbyterian Church has not kept pace with the progress of the people. Certainly it has not become the dominant religion in any one State, much less in our whole land.

Yet at the close of the Revolution it was far in the ascendancy. It fought the Revolution. It more than once turned the tide of battle. A Presbyterian minister was most conspicuous in the Congress that wrote the Declaration of Independence. It was intensely for the colonies, and as opposed to the Episcopal Church, was on the popular side. Hundreds of families came out of the Episcopal Church after the Revolution, because of its Tory character.

Why, with this popular start, did not New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio become as intensely Presbyterian as Scotland itself?

The Baptists and Methodists were hardly born. They had no popular favor. No educated ministry. Yet they outnumber the Presbyterians two or three to one.

It may be said that one of these denominations, at least, is intensely oligarchical. It may seem so, but the officers of the local church are from the people every year, and the presiding elders and bishop keep their ears open to their voice usually.

How is it in the Presbyterian Church?

The pastor may be chosen for life. Years may come and the whole congregation change, but he changes not. This was especially true in the early part of the last century.

The session has absolute authority, against which there is appeal, it is true, but not to the people, but to higher courts composed of men of the same authority and office.

The average session has always a majority of members who have sat on it without any reference to the people, for years.

They have an almost absolute authority without recall. Is it any wonder that they become autocratic and conservative and non-progressive often to an intense degree?

The writer in a brief observation in life has known an elder who was so dominant in the session that he became, through the session, the despot of the congregation, and held it back for fifty years. Even where a petition came up from the congregation signed by almost all the active workers in the church asking for a little innovation it was blocked by two elders in another church.

This autocratic, oligarchical form of government is against the democratic sweep of the times. The people have been clamoring for more "say so" in the affairs of both Church and State. We have not given it to them, and they have gone by us and entered other churches where they had some say in the affairs of the local church.

Is there any real Scripture ground for the perpetual nature of the office of an elder?

Would it not be a good thing if the congregation were given an opportunity to say who should be the elders, who should constitute the session?

How about giving the congregation the right to choose a new pastor once in a while?

If the congregation voted the apportionments and sent them up to Presbytery would we not come nearer getting them?

Would not all these things be in line with the growing power of the people?

Who will vote for a more democratic form of government in our Church as well as in State?

A. A. L.