

The Negro

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AN ARGUMENT

AGAINST THE UNION

of the

Cumberland Presbyterian Church

and the

Presbyterian Church

in the

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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May 1904

This address was prepared before the meeting of the Assembly, with the exception of one portion of it, and was delivered, in part only, owing to the shortness of the time allowed for addresses, before the Assembly, at Buffalo, May 27, 1904. It is published by request, and in the hope that it may help to create a sentiment that will defeat the measure before the presbyteries.

*"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."
—Acts 10:34.*

HAYWORTH PUBLISHING HOUSE, WASHINGTON

31000

THE AUTHOR

1904

Organic Union Between the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

Knowing that this subject of union between the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and our own Church would come up before the General Assembly, I jotted down a few things that I wanted to say in regard to it. Organic union between these two churches is all right, and no one would welcome it more heartily than myself, provided it can be effected on principles that are consistent with our own past record, as a church, and that are in harmony with the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ.

As to whether these two churches are in accord doctrinally, or sufficiently so, to justify their coming together, it is not my purpose to discuss; there is another aspect of the subject, however, to which I do desire to direct attention, and that is the proposition of our Cumberland brethren, that in case of organic union, our Form of Government shall be so modified as to admit of separate Presbyteries and Synods within the same territorial limits. I refer to recommendation No. 1, which reads as follows: "It is recommended that such a change be made in the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States of America, as will allow additional or separate Presbyteries and Synods, to be organized in exceptional cases, wholly or in part within the territorial limits of existing presbyteries and synods, respectively, for a particular race or nationality, if desired by such race or nationality."

In the first place, let me say, There is danger, and very great danger at a time like this, of overestimating, or of attaching undue importance to the subject of organic union. A member of my own Presbytery came to me a little before I left, and in a most enthusiastic manner, said, "I want you to vote for union; I want you to vote for it with both hands." That was the way *he* felt; that is not the way *I* feel. Union is all right, but it isn't the thing of paramount importance. And we should be careful lest in our eagerness for it, we overlook matters that are vastly more important to the interests of the Master's kingdom.

There is danger also of overestimating the importance of mere numbers. It is perfectly natural that all of our churches should desire to grow, to expand, to enlarge their membership; but unfortunately this has become an evil, and a growing evil in too many of our churches, arising out of the fact, that in our desire for numbers, we often fail to sufficiently discriminate so as to make the increase of any real value to the church or to the cause of Christ. There is this danger also of being influenced unduly, in a discussion like this, by this thought of numbers. One of the first and most ostensible effects of organic union is an enlarged membership; and we are apt to think that that is a big thing; that it will greatly increase our respectability and standing, as compared with other denominations. It may be a big thing, and it may not be. The value of a church or denomination, as an instrument in the hand of God in effecting His purpose, in ministering to dying, sinful men, does not depend upon numbers. "One shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight." It is quality that tells, not quantity. God can do more with a church of fifty thousand men and women of the stamp of Gideon's three hundred than he can with one of a million adherents of the stamp of the twenty-two thousand cowards who went back to their homes at the first opportunity, or even of the 9,700,

who were ordered to their tents. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me." And it is the church that has in it men and women, whether few or many, upon whom the Spirit of God has come, that will wield the mightiest influences and that will do most for the upbuilding of the Master's kingdom.

There is also another thing, which it is important that we should bear in mind in this discussion, and that is, what the true mission of the church is. This is clearly indicated in the first chapter of the Acts, "Ye shall be My *witnesses* both in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." What is it to witness for Christ? If I understand it, it is first, to hold Him up before a sinful world as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The apostle Paul said, "I am determined to know nothing among men but Jesus and Him crucified." And again, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;" and, when we so preach Christ, we are witnesses for Him.

Second, to witness for Him, is to stand up squarely and uncompromisingly for Christian principles. And by this I do not mean simply the verbal declaration, or defense of these principles, but the exemplification of them in our lives,—the living them out. John said, you remember, "The *life* is the light of men." And we are told the tree is known by its fruit. And Jesus says, "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I command you?"

Does Christianity represent anything? Does it stand for anything? What does it represent? What does it stand for? It stands, among other things,—for the Ten Commandments; for all that is contained in the Sermon on the Mount; and all that is contained in the Thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians,—that wonderful chapter on love. The

apostle Paul, who wrote that chapter, and who had the mind of Christ as nearly, perhaps, as any man who ever lived, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells us that Jesus Christ came to break down all walls of separation, and to make us brethren; and, as if to make still plainer what the mind of Jesus was in reference to these differences which divide men, he boldly declares, not as in the Old Version, "In Christ Jesus, there is neither Greek nor Jew," but "there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all."

Christianity stands for something; it represents something,—and it is the duty of the church to make plain what the things are which differentiate it from the world, and to stand up for those things. Jesus said "My kingdom is not of this world," and therefore the principles which govern men of the world, are not to be allowed to prevail in His kingdom. What did Jesus mean when He said, "Ye are the light of the world," when He cautioned His disciples not to put their light under a bushel, but on a candlestick, but this very thing of which I am speaking, this making plain to others, in theory, as well as in practice, the difference between them and the world? The very object of giving forth light is to make manifest, to reveal; and the things to be revealed are, not only Jesus Christ as the Savior of men, but the great principles which lie at the foundation of His religion, and by which men are to be governed in all the relations of life.

It may not be an easy thing to stand up for Christian principles; it may not be a popular thing to do; it may not even be a safe thing to do, looked at from a merely human standpoint, but there is no option left to us as Christians. Peter, under most trying circumstances, said, "We must obey God rather than man:" and we *must*, never mind what man may say, never mind what perils it may involve, never mind what losses it may entail, never mind how unpopular

it may make us. It is better to have the approbation of God than the applause of man; it is better to suffer for righteousness' sake than to make any cowardly compromise with evil, merely to avoid trouble. The contest between right and wrong, between what is Christian and what is not Christian in the church may be postponed, but sooner or later the issue has to be met and fought out. And hence, what Lowell says is true:

“They enslave their children’s children,
Who make compromise with sin.”

It is the duty of the church not only to witness for Christ, in this way, but it is one of its highest and most important functions. What the world needs more than anything else is truth, Christian truth, clearly enunciated, sincerely accepted, and lived up to,—the truth of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ,—not in the abstract, but in the concrete, incarnated in your life, and mine; a *church*, a *visible church*, made up of men and women who have the spirit of Christ, and who are willing to follow Him through evil report as well as good. He was the friend of publicans and sinners; he was not ashamed to call us brethren; He was not ashamed to sit down and eat with Publicans and sinners; and in His great desire to save men had no time to waste in the discussion of petty, insignificant, and I may say, unworthy questions, such as come up sometimes for discussion, even before great ecclesiastical assemblies. He was anxious to reveal God to man, and to lift man up to God,—not white men, or black men, not brown men, or yellow men, or red men, but man, sinful man. And if that was the dominant spirit in the church to-day many of the questions that come up to disturb our peace never would be heard of; never would be even so much as thought of. With the love of Christ burning in the heart, and a passion for souls, what

difference would the color of a man's skin make? Who would care? Who would stop to ask? Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the *world*. He did not die for one race, but for all races. What difference does it make to Him, whether a man is white or black? We can not conceive of that question being raised by Him except to rebuke it. He was the son of man as well as the Son of God, and was thus affiliated with the whole human race, and was equally interested in all. "What God hath cleansed call not thou common or unclean." Who are we that we should presume to say to any set of men in the Church of God, Be separate; stand over there by yourselves? Thus far, and no farther!

With these preliminary remarks let us now look at this proposition which has come to us from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, asking us to so modify our Form of Government as to admit of the organization of separate Presbyteries and Synods within the same territorial limits for separate races. I hope that no such proposition will be accepted by our church. I am totally, absolutely opposed to it, and for the following reasons:

(1.) It aims to modify a rule under which we have existed during our entire history, as a church, and under which we have prospered. There is no evidence anywhere, so far as I am aware, that goes to show that the continuance of this rule will operate to the detriment of our own church or to the general interest of the Master's kingdom. In the absence of such proof it would be folly, therefore, it seems to me, for us to consent to a change in our organic law simply because we are asked to do so, by another body of Christians, less numerous than ourselves, less wealthy than ourselves, and in no way better prepared than ourselves to judge of the wisdom or unwisdom of the rule which it seeks to modify,—in fact, not so well prepared. Why should we give up a rule that has worked well with us, simply because

it has not worked well with somebody else, or because they think it has not, or, that it should be otherwise?

(2.) There is no evidence that the modification or change asked for, and which has been tried by the Cumberland brethren, has been more advantageous to the colored people themselves than the plan in vogue in our own church. The Cumberland Presbyterians have done some work among the colored people,—and I do not wish in any way to disparage or undervalue that work, but by far the most important work that has been done for them by any Presbyterian body has been by our own church. And the success which has attended our work is due not only to the fact that we have expended more money in the work, but because in this church the manhood of the Negro has always been recognized; he has not been segregated, pushed apart by himself into separate Presbyteries and synods. All of our ministers, white and black alike, have met together as brethren, in the same presbyteries and synods, and in the same General Assembly. The Negro is not a fool. He knows what is due him. He has suffered, it is true, from the blighting effects of slavery, but there is still some manhood left in him. And because of this he does not take kindly to these invidious distinctions, and in his inmost soul resents them. And I honor him for it. And I ask, before God, is it Christian, is it in accordance with the spirit of Christ, to humiliate an individual or a race, to surround it with conditions which tend to destroy its own self-respect, and to belittle it in the estimation of others? I am glad to say that our church in its work in the South has never adopted that policy, and that is one secret of the success which has attended its work. If I am not greatly mistaken no church can hope to have very much influence with this race which ignores its manhood and which acts on the assumption that it is so hopelessly inferior that there is to be no relation between the races, that even in presbyteries and synods, in

holy convocations, where men meet together to talk about *spiritual* things, about the interests of the Master's kingdom, it isn't wise for the races to mingle. I wonder sometimes how God can sit still and see such things going on in the name of religion, and not in some way shatter the whole tissue of lies to pieces! There isn't a thing in the word of God; there isn't a line or syllable in the inspired record to justify any such course as that. It is contrary to the whole spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ; and I am glad that our church has never given its sanction to any such policy,—and I trust it never will.

(3.) I am opposed to it because I believe it would be positively wrong for us to make any such concession under the circumstances. *Why* institute separate presbyteries and synods within the same territorial limits? You know, and I know, and we all know out of what this demand has come. It is because in the Southern section of our country there is a strong public sentiment against the mingling of the races, in any capacity except as master and servant, as employer and employee, for fear of social equality; and out of that sentiment has come the enactment of Jim crow car laws, disfranchisement, and all similar measures that have had for their object the humiliation of the Negro,—the keeping him, as they say, "in his place." So strong is this sentiment that no one disregards it without losing caste. There is a stigma attached to being even in the same presbytery or synod with a Negro Presbyterian, even though these bodies may come together only once or twice a year. The white brother is made to feel that somehow he has degraded himself by such affiliation; that he is acting in a way of which he ought to be ashamed, in a way such as no white man ought to act.

At the close of the great Civil War there went into the South as noble a band of men and women as God ever commissioned to do His work. They went there full of love to God and man, for the purpose of lifting up the millions of

freedmen from whom the shackles had been stricken by Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. And you know how they worked, how faithfully, how earnestly, how unselfishly, you know something of the sacrifices which they made, and yet they were everywhere ostracised, everywhere treated as social pariahs, by the master-class in the South. Only a few months ago I was in Atlanta, Ga., and met there one of the noblest men it has ever been my privilege to meet. He is an Englishman, and for more than thirty years, has been laboring in the State of Georgia, among the colored people. He is now an old man. I heard him in a public meeting, in the city of Atlanta, make an address, in which he recounted his experiences. He spoke of the circumstances under which he entered the work; of what he had suffered; of his privations; of the perils through which he had passed; and of what under God he had been enabled to accomplish. It was one of the most thrilling and pathetic addresses to which I have ever listened. And the most pathetic, and illuminating part of it all was his closing words: "And now," he said, "after more than thirty years of earnest work, in which I have sought to glorify God in trying to lift up these people, I do not believe, there are five Southern white men in the whole city of Atlanta, that would invite me to take a meal in their houses. And what is my offense? This, only this, I have identified myself with these people of color; I have gone among them, in their homes, and have had them come into mine; have treated them just as Jesus would have treated them had he been here." The splendid record which this man had made, the noble work which he had done, the Christly spirit which he exhibited, all went for naught, simply because he dared to treat his colored brother as one human being might be expected to treat another, to say nothing of how one Christian might be expected to treat another. As he sat down I could hardly keep the tears back, and instinctively, found myself saying, What an indictment

is that of the Christianity of the city of Atlanta. Shame on the religious sentiment of any community in which such work as that can go unrecognized, unrewarded.

Such is Southern public sentiment on the race question; and it is out of deference to this sentiment, that the great Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, is asked to *change* its organic law. Where *ought* the change to be made? In the organic law of the church, or in this public sentiment that dominates the South? *Where* ought it to be made? If the Bible is true; if Jesus Christ meant what He said in the Sermon on the Mount and in His other utterances, and, if we are to follow His example, and to be influenced by His Spirit, in a word, if Christianity is not a miserable farce, there can be no doubt as to *where* the change ought to be made, and as to what the duty of the church is in the premises. Its duty is to seek to mould public sentiment in accordance with Christian principles, and not to be moulded by it. Jesus never made any concessions to an unrighteous public sentiment; never allowed Himself to be influenced in the least, in His actions, by the standards that were set up for Him under such circumstances. He found a public sentiment in His day, even in the church, which said, Have nothing to do with publicans and sinners; but He went right on mingling with them and eating with them all the same, yea, went and even invited Himself to become the guest of one of the chief publicans, and took another one of them and brought him into the most intimate relation with Him,—Matthew the Publican, the author of the first gospel, who became one of the Twelve. He found in His day a public sentiment, built up through the traditions of the elders, which so hedged God's laws about as to make it a sin even to do an act of mercy on the Sabbath. How did He treat that sentiment? Did He yield to it? No; He resisted it; He refused to be bound by their traditions. And that is what the church must do. It should not allow itself

to be influenced in the least by public sentiment, except so far as that sentiment is in accordance with the spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ. "It hath been said by them of old, thus and so; but I say unto you," said Jesus. And so, in the discussion of this question, it matters not what those of old may have said; it matters not what Southern public sentiment may demand, the thing by which we are to be governed is the mind of Jesus. How would He deal with this question? Would He allow separate presbyteries and synods to be erected out of deference to this unchristian, Negro-hating sentiment in the South? And if not, can we afford to do it? Ought we to do it?

I listened yesterday with thrilling interest to the eloquent address of the Rev. Dr. Coyle, in which he called upon the church to relegate into the background the name of Calvin and every other name, in order that we might get back to Jesus, might see Jesus only. In no part of that address was he more eloquent than where he said, "What right has any man to set up standards and ideals below the standard set by Jesus Christ;" and yet at that very time he was arguing in favor of the consummation of a union between our church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, one condition of which was the setting apart of colored ministers and elders into separate presbyteries and synods, simply because of their color, thereby drawing the color line in the church, thereby encouraging a spirit of caste in the church. Is that getting back to Christ? Is that, or is it not, setting up standards and ideals below the standard set by Jesus Christ? Sometimes I wonder how God can sit still and see such things going on in the name of religion and not in some way utterly repudiate it as He did the pretended religion of the old Jewish Church, when He directed Isaiah to pen the opening words of his prophesy, where he says, "What unto Me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah: I have had enough of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the

fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; new moon and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies,—I can not away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and appointed feasts My soul hateth; they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary of bearing them. * * * Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." And what are all such eloquent appeals, calling men to get back to Christ, and exhorting them not to set up standards and ideals below the standards set up by Christ as long as those who make them are willing to sanction the spirit of caste in the church, but "the fat of rams," and "the incense" which is an abomination unto God?" Dr. Coyle either did not understand the full import of his words; did not believe what he was saying, or else he was merely juggling with words for effect. It is a very easy thing to get back to Christ in *words*; but if it ends there, in the mere verbal declaration, what does it amount to? It is only sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. Let us be done with this temporizing spirit in the church, with this disposition to pare down the Word of God to suit our prejudices and the prejudices of others. If we are not willing to accept the plain teaching of the Word, and to be governed by the Spirit of Christ, let us frankly say so, and not attempt to mislead others by misrepresenting Him. "If the light within thee be darkness, how great is that darkness."

(4.) I am opposed to it, because a step like this, on the part of this great Presbyterian Church, will have the effect of encouraging the Negro-hating spirit that is already too strongly developed in this country, and thus make it all the harder for this poor, struggling race to rise. The papers a

few days ago called attention to an incident which occurred in Cambridge, Mass. A young white man from the city of Buffalo, who is attending the Lawrence Scientific School, was behaving in a disorderly way, when a colored policeman came up and attempted to arrest him; but he fought desperately, saying, that he would never permit himself to be arrested by a Negro. A little before that the papers called attention to the execution of two men at Pittsburg, Pa., the one white, and the other colored. The dying request of the white man was, that he might not be executed on the same scaffold, at the same time, with the Negro, in order that his family might be saved from the disgrace. It was no disgrace to be hung, but it was a disgrace to be hung at the same time with a Negro. I have a friend who lives next to a white family. The white family has a black dog, and the colored family has one that is several shade lighter. One day, while these two dogs were playing on the outside in front of the house, my friend saw the little white boy come out, and heard him address his dog, thus: "Jack, come here, sir. What are you doing? I am ashamed of you. The idea of your playing with a colored dog." The dog was colored, although it was lighter than his dog, because it belonged to a colored family, showing that the feeling of race antagonism is being instilled into the very children. And the effect of the vote of this Assembly will be to encourage that feeling, to give the weight of its sanction to that condition of things. God calls upon the church to "seek justice, to relieve the oppressed," not to become an instrument in the hand of the oppressor, but to throw its influence against injustice and oppression in every shape and form.

"Out of the wilderness, out of the night,
Has the black man crawled to the dawn of light;
Beaten by lashes and bound by chains,

A beast of burden with soul and brains,
He has come through sorrow and need and woe,
And the cry of his heart is to know, to know."

Let us see to it that no step on our part, as a church, is taken that will help to increase his burdens; to make the struggle all the harder for him. Let us do all we can to help him; all we can to stimulate his self-respect: and not to humiliate him, not to increase the obstacles in his way.

For these reasons I desire here in this presence to enter my solemn and emphatic protest against the proposed union with any such modification of our Form of Government, as is embodied in Recommendation No. 1. In the language of a recent editorial in the *New York Independent*, "The Negroes want no new line drawn against them. They are proud of their position in the Northern Church, and the Northern Church has firmly held to the Christian position when some other Churches have faltered. The question for the Northern Assembly to answer is, whether it will approve this union at the expense of humiliating ten or twenty thousands of its members. Is it ready to crowd out its own brethren for the sake of placating the prejudices of its newcomers? For the sake of a compromise on Calvinism will it sacrifice its Christianity? And then will the Moderator offer a prayer of thanksgiving, and the Assembly sing the doxology grateful that grace has been given them to unite in kicking the Negro down stairs? Perhaps so,—the committee recommends it; but as Massachusetts and Rhode Island are ashamed that their ancestors held slaves and engaged in the slave trade, and as the old slave States are on the road to that same shame, and already declare that they would not restore slavery if they could, so, not many years hence, it will be a long memory of deep shame if the Presbyterian Church shall take one step backward in the recognition of the brotherhood of men in the Church of Christ."

To all of which I say, amen. God forbid that our church should ever take any such backward step. Our duty is to let our light shine; to stand up squarely and uncompromisingly for Christian principles. And here there comes to me those ringing, stirring lines of our own lamented Dr. Maltbie Babcock,

Be strong!

Say not the days are evil,—Who's to blame?—

And fold the hands, and acquiesce—O shame!

Stand up, speak out, and bravely, in God's name."

And *that* is the note that needs to be sounded, and sounded with ever-increasing emphasis, throughout the whole Church. We must speak out, and speak out bravely, in God's name, if this spirit of caste, that is rising in the Church, is ever to be exorcised; if the Church is to be true to the great principles of the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man. Organic union is a matter of little or no importance as compared with this. Better wait; better wait a century; better that union should never be consummated than at such a sacrifice. Let us say to our Cumberland brethren, and say to them frankly, without any attempt to dodge the issue, "We should be glad to unite with you, but we can not, if you insist upon Recommendation No. 1. And let us say this in the spirit of love, but at the same time, in such a way as to make them feel that we mean it,—say it as Luther said as he stood before the Diet of Worms, "*Here I take my stand. I can do no more.*" And it was because he took his *stand*, on the *Word of God*, that the Reformation came that shook Europe from centre to circumference, that emancipated it from the tyranny of the Papal Power, and out of which have come all the blessings of Protestant Christianity. And so to-day, if we take our stand, as a Church, on God's *Word*, against this spirit of caste in the Church, we will do more to help on the cause of God in the world, to increase

men's respect for true religion, than if we yield to it for the sake of union, or of gratifying an unrighteous sentiment that is growing in our church in the South. In the golden words of Tillotson, "Let us never do anything for religion which is contrary to religion." Union? Yes; but never at the sacrifice of a great principle; never by sanctioning the spirit of caste, or by putting the stamp of inferiority upon any class or race within the Church. Here is where I stand; and here is where the Church ought to stand; where it will stand, if it is true to Jesus Christ.