
A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

THE

BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

ECCLESIASTICAL QUESTIONS IN THE NATIONAL COUNCIL.

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THE SOUTHERN QUESTION.

IN reviewing certain ecclesiastical questions which have appeared in the National Council of the Congregational churches of the United States, we give the first place to the Southern question, as it is the most vital. There was a sharp contention over it at Worcester, in 1889, and again at Minneapolis, in 1892. How did it happen that in both Councils principles and practices which should have admitted at once the delegates from certain conferences in Georgia and in Alabama to seats in the Council, were invoked to keep them out? It is worthy of inquiry how a method of procedure in fellowship, foreign in its origin, subversive of our constitutive principle, and therefore revolutionary, obtained such currency in Georgia and Alabama as to hinder union there among our churches, and in the North as to stir two Councils as nothing else had stirred them, except the attempt in the last Council to belittle the question of representation of our churches in their benevolent and missionary societies.

Fortunately the outcome of the discussion in each Council was substantially in harmony with our polity.

Origin of Congregational Churches in Georgia and Alabama.

This inquiry is necessary in order to explain how the Southern question came into the National Council. About the year 1850, the elements of a separation from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, began to take form, largely in consequence of "the degraded station which local ministers were obliged to take and maintain in said church. Although a great deal of the work of the church was done by them, they were neither allowed to exercise any governing function, . . . nor to have any voice in saying who should govern either their converts or themselves. This truth, perhaps, was to a greater extent operative in the production of the Congregational Methodist Church than any other one thing. . . . The great sun and centre of their system was the desire that there should be no artificial, unscriptural, and hurtful distinction among" the ministers of Christ.[1] Two years later, in 1852, the cleavage began, and the Congregational Methodist Church emerged, "whose doctrine [was] exactly Methodistic," but "whose government [was] in accordance with our civil institutions and their own ideas of propriety."[2] This communion, born of the love of Christian liberty, like our own and the "Mission Union" in Sweden, spread into several Southern States, being Methodist in doctrine and Congregational in polity, numbering, in 1881, about twenty thousand members.[3] At a date not far from 1886 a movement of these churches towards union with the Congregational churches began. It was found that the doctrinal basis of the National Council and the creed issued by the

[1] Origin and Early History of the Congregational Methodist Church, by Rev. S. C. McDaniel, pp. 13, 14.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Commission of the Council in 1883 presented no barrier to union, while in polity the two bodies were substantially one. Conference and correspondence helped on the movement, until, in 1888, about fifty Congregational Methodist churches in Georgia, and later some sixty-three in Alabama, sought organic fellowship with the Congregational churches of the country. These churches were composed almost wholly of whites, and were organized into bodies which they called "conferences," which term designates them throughout this article. They naturally sought union with the Congregational churches in Georgia and in Alabama, where the movement began.

As soon as the civil war had opened the way, the American Missionary Association, supported almost wholly by the Congregational churches of the Northern States, penetrated the South with its schools and churches, composed largely of emancipated slaves. These churches appeared in our Year-Book in 1869,—Georgia with three churches, and Alabama with one. Not until 1880 were these two States represented in our National Council, when Alabama had fifteen Congregational churches, and Georgia twelve. Their delegates were enrolled without debate or question; those from Alabama under the name of "General Conference" in 1880 and 1883, but under the name "Congregational Association" in 1886, 1889, and 1892; those from Georgia under the term "Conference" in 1880, "Congregational Association" in 1883, "General Congregational Association" in 1886, and "Congregational Association" in 1889. We shall call these bodies "associations" in this paper. When the controversy first arose in 1889, the Association of Georgia, composed of the thirteen churches planted and fostered by the American Missionary Association, had a recognized standing in our connection, while the conferences of the Congregational Methodist Church, seeking connection with us, embraced

about fifty churches in that State. They came organized as conferences, wishing to retain their organizations.

Possible Methods of Union.

Two ways of effecting the desired connection seemed possible, and as the Association of Georgia preferred, under advice, one method, and the conferences preferred the other, the contention arose which was carried into the National Council. One way was, that the fifty churches individually or in conferences should join the association of thirteen churches, as the existing State Association already admitted to representation in the National Council. This plan seemed plausible. But the thirteen churches of the association occupied but parts of eight counties in a State of one hundred and thirty-eight counties; and it looked a little presumptuous for so small a body to claim to be the State Association in the face of fifty churches seeking our fellowship. The other way—the one preferred by the churches coming to us—was, to hold a convention of all the churches in the State, or of the one association and of the several conferences into which the churches were divided, as co-ordinate bodies, and thus by united action constitute a State body, embracing all churches and local bodies on terms of equality. This latter seemed to be the courteous and Christian way, whatever rights the association may have acquired in virtue of its recognition by the National Council. But which of these methods was supported by the principles and usages of our churches? The latter was not only the courteous and Christian, but also and emphatically

The Congregational Way.

Our polity is singular in holding that every fully constituted congregation of believers is, under Christ, independent of all external authority in matters pertaining to it as a spiritual body. Even the common principle of fel-

lowship is subject to this constitutive principle, namely, the completeness of each church in itself. Hence associations of such churches can have no other authority than to admit and exclude members in the exercise of the reciprocal rights of fellowship. On the same principle, as one church is in essential character equal to any other church, so one association of such churches is equal to any other association of similar churches. A few churches may not therefore pre-empt a State by uniting in a prior organization therein, and then compel all other Congregational churches and associations or conferences in that State to unite with them on their own terms in order to a wider fellowship. The churches and associations subsequently formed, by virtue of their independency, possess the same rights, privileges, and freedom as those first organized. This is the logical and the inevitable outcome of their independency. Priority in birth and affiliation gives, on Congregational principles, no rights not enjoyed by the churches later formed. The last born is equal to the first born, in all that makes it a church of Christ. And the same is true of co-ordinate associations or conferences of churches. If priority of origin and representation could give the association first in a State the right to pre-empt that State, i. e. to be recognized as the State body, then all churches and associations subsequently formed, would need to join it, in order to representation in the National Council as united in a State organization.[1] Then such prior organization by its constitution could, if it would, exclude from membership therein all churches that admitted Free Masons, Odd Fellows, and members of other fraternities to their communion, and so from their full representation in the National Council, as they could not unite with the State body.

But, it may be said, that the prior associations of Georgia and Alabama were, in fact, recognized by the National

[1] Constitution of the National Council, II. 2.

Council. As comprising at the time the only Congregational churches in their respective States that sought our fellowship, they were admitted to seats in the National Council. But the question, whether or not they were properly State bodies as defined by the Constitution of the said Council, was not raised or determined by such recognition. This question did not come up until 1889, and again in 1892, when after discussion neither the Georgia nor the Alabama Association was treated as a State body, but, instead, as a local or district association.

Such was the fact; and such treatment the principle we have considered constrained the Council to give. Was the Council justified also by precedent? In order to ascertain how our State associations or bodies came into existence, inquiries have been made under the following questions: namely,

1. "Was the general State body of Congregational churches in your State constituted by a convention of said churches (or of the local conferences or associations of said churches) called for the purpose?"

2. "Or was the said State body formed by the local conferences or associations (subsequently organized) uniting with the association or conference first formed, they regarding it as the State body?"

The replies of the proper officers, based on the records of the conventions, are conclusive as to the Congregational method. The registrar of the Association of Oregon, not possessing its earliest records, could give no answers, and we have failed to obtain them from others. The secretary of the Association of South Dakota answers, that in a general way the State Association was first, out of which all the district bodies except two were subsequently formed. Every other State gives an affirmative answer to the first question, and a negative answer to the second. Thus the declaration made in the last Council respecting our usages, based on

our principles, is confirmed completely by the records of the formation of our State bodies. And, adversely, the claim put forth in the National Council for the associations of Georgia and Alabama, as being the proper and recognized State bodies respectively, which the conferences coming to us should join, has not a single precedent on which to rest; for South Dakota is far enough from sustaining it.

With both principle and precedent against them, how were the associations in Georgia and Alabama led to put forth such claims, which claims so many good Congregationalists defended? As nothing could have been further from their purpose than to embarrass the formation of the most cordial relations between the colored and the white churches, why did the colored churches, in fact, hinder fellowship? It will not do to say that the false claim had its origin in jealousy or friction between the American Missionary Association and the American Home Missionary Society working in the same State. Nor did that claim arise from an assumption of superiority on the part of the colored churches. There is, we believe, a more honorable explanation.

A Presbyterian Origin.

A Presbyterian element may possibly remain in the composition and management of the American Missionary Association; but certainly Presbyterian views in New York City and in Georgia and Alabama, imbibed from a Presbyterian environment, unconsciously gave origin to the claim made for the associations. In our polity one association or conference may for cause overlap another association or conference in territory. But the Presbyterian polity allows no two presbyteries or synods for any reason to cover the same ground. This is its law: "The General Assembly must forbid the organization of more Presbyteries than one upon the same ground, allowing no distinction of race or color or language to interfere with the unity and simplicity of the

oversight which the Constitution of this Church requires."[1] This is put by another authority in this way: "Can two Presbyteries occupy the same ground? No. It would be contrary both to the letter and the spirit of our constitution and the teaching of the word of God."[2] If we suppose an idea of fellowship born of this Presbyterian principle, no matter how ill defined or whence it came, to have been in the minds of the advisers of the colored churches, we find an adequate explanation of the conduct of their associations. For example, in 1891, the secretary of the Alabama Association "notified every unassociated Congregational church in the State of which he could learn, of the . . . provision of its constitution," that "churches and licensed and ordained ministers, having adopted for substance of doctrine the Articles of Faith of the Association, may become members of [that] body by vote of the same."[3] But on Congregational principles it was as presumptuous as unexpected that an officer of an association of seventeen churches should, in the name of and for the said association, propose to sixty-three churches, seeking to transfer their connection to us, to join his association. But if the conferences overlapped the territory of the association, as some of them did, it was perfectly natural, under a Presbyterial infection, for the association to play the role of a Presbyterian synod, and intimate to them all what was the proper thing to do. This intimation was treated with respectful silence. On the same supposition, it was very suitable for the association, in making a concession, in its view, of its rights, so far as to appoint a committee of conference, to instruct that committee "to solicit all the Congregational churches to join [it as] the State Congregational Association."[4] And, again, when its committee met

[1] Moore's Presbyterian Digest (ed. 1873), p. 137.

[2] Dr. Hodge's What is Presbyterian Law? p. 182.

[3] Statement of a Committee of the Alabama Association, printed and given members of the National Council (dated October 8, 1892), p. 1.

[4] Statement of the Committee, p. 2.

in convention with equal committees from the several conferences, it was logical, on Presbyterian principles, for the said committee to withdraw when its motion, "That all the Congregational churches of the State of Alabama unite with the Alabama State Association now in existence,"[1] was lost, and a motion to form a new State body was carried; but, on Congregational principles and precedents, this conduct of the association and its committee was simply intolerable. Yet the said committee printed these transactions, and gave the circular to the members of the National Council as a justification of their cause. This is the more strange, since the Presbyterian law, above quoted, was read in the National Council, in 1889, in contrast with the liberty of Congregationalism, which had then allowed on the roll of that Council two district bodies covering the same ground. Indeed, the previous Council of 1886 had enrolled delegates from district bodies covering the same ground. So, too, by the admission of the delegates from the Georgia Association, and from two conferences in that State that overlapped, the Council at Worcester after hours of debate rejected the claim of said association to be treated as a State body. Though the principle that two district bodies may cover the same ground had thus been three times recognized, the attempt was again made in the Council of 1892 to reverse the case, so far at least as Alabama was concerned. Men seemed to have reasoned in this way: If the colored association be held to be a local body, then some white churches must join it, to prevent the association and some of the conferences from overlapping in territory. On the other hand, if it be held to be the State body, as its recognition by the National Council would seem to imply, then all the white churches must join it individually or as conferences. Thus under this Presbyterian view, whichever character should be given the association, some or all the white churches must join it.

[1] Statement of the Committee, p. 3.

To those holding this view, the solution of the dilemma presented by the white churches seemed a violation of rights.

Contest over Supposed Rights.

Thus the association felt aggrieved that its invitation, its solicitation, and its motion, that the white churches unite with it, were rejected; while those churches united in conferences, having a clearer apprehension of the principles of our polity, felt that the claims of the association were unwarranted, and so presented other plans of forming a State body, which plans clearly put all the churches and local bodies on an exact equality. The method of affiliation, if equal and fair, was wholly a matter to be determined by each and every State as they might deem best. The National Council had never inquired into such matters beyond the questions of equal rights and representation. It is forbidden by its constitution to do so. So long as local and State bodies are evangelical in faith, Congregational in polity, and orderly in conduct, they are entitled to representation in the National Council if they so desire. That Council has no right to inquire why one State prefers one method of affiliation and another State another method. This being incontestably the case, it is clear that, had it not been for the Presbyterian notion, above referred to, the churches in Georgia and in Alabama would have organized State bodies in conventions called for the purpose as the majority in convention should have determined, which bodies would have been promptly admitted to representation in the National Council. For neither in the composition of the conventions nor in the constitutions proposed was there the least trace of inequality or unfairness. The documents prove this.

The Color Line.

But some supposed—and they assiduously disseminated their supposition—that the rejection of the proposals made

in one way and another by the colored associations, that the white conferences should join them as State bodies already existing, was due to color prejudice. It was declared that the rights of the black churches and associations were for this reason being trampled upon by the white churches and conferences. Sympathy was thus aroused over what was supposed to be the color line. Unfortunately no inquiry had then been made into the genesis of our State bodies, by which to vindicate either side by the facts of the case. Indeed, the statement of our usages, since verified by the facts without exception, was so new to some, and seemingly so absurd, that a man privately called the statement "supreme nonsense." On the contrary, the refusal of the new churches and organizations to recognize the claims of the small associations in the States of Georgia and Alabama to be State bodies, was inspired by a sense of liberty instinctively rising in opposition to dictation by a minority, partly by an unwillingness to abandon their own existing organizations, and partly by their belief that the plan proposed by them was as good on principle as the one pressed by the associations; and the color line had nothing to do with it. As this may be doubted by some, let us speak more fully and with justice to all.

At the request of the writer, Rev. Simeon C. McDaniel, during the debate at Worcester, in 1889, wrote out a statement of principles which all delegates from the conferences of Georgia, in 1889, and all delegates from the conferences of Alabama, to the Council, in 1892, individually affirmed, which the churches in both States would endorse, and which was given in the Worcester Council as the position held by the churches coming to us and asking admission to our fellowship. The statement is this:—

"1. That all Christians, regardless of race, nationality, or color, are equal in Christ and in his church.

"2. That no Christian or Christian church should be denied fellowship on the ground of race or color.

"3. That in matters of association this [National] Council cannot prescribe modes, but churches and individuals must be left to choose their own modes and associates, so long as they do not violate the law of God.

"4. [That] the organizations in Georgia [and in Alabama] are Congregational in faith and polity, and are one in fellowship with the Congregational churches of the United States; and that the offer made by them to unite with the Georgia Association [and the Alabama Association] in the formation of a common general body in Georgia [and in Alabama] was Christian, fair, and Congregational." [1]

In view of the use made of his letter to Rev. John R. McLean, Rev. S. C. McDaniel reaffirms the statement above given, saying: "These principles *were* my principles in 1889, and they *are* my principles in 1892. What I said or wrote then, I will stand by to-day." [2] The other delegate in the National Council of 1889, representing the new churches in Georgia, also reaffirms the same.

Conference Plan of Union.

On the principles given in the above statement, a plan of organizing a State body was formulated by the churches of the white conferences and presented to the association of colored churches, first in Georgia, and later in Alabama, in which plan all Congregational churches and local bodies were placed on an exact equality. Though not the method

[1] The original document,-containing also a short preamble and a fifth resolution on the seating of the delegates, is in the possession of the writer. Rev. Sullivan F. Gale, of the Florida General Association, added the following, also approved by the said delegates from Georgia and Alabama, viz., "That the seating of the Conference delegates from Georgia is one that concerns only fact and polity. That any deliverance of the Council on the matter of the stated fellowship of the churches by Associations is a subject of gravest importance, and should be made general and not specific."

[2] MS. letter, dated Nov. 26, 1892.

prevalent in our States, it had the example of Massachusetts in its favor. But whether prevalent or not, the churches of those States had the inalienable right to adopt it; and, if fair and equal, the National Council had no further concern with it than to ascertain such fact. There was in it, in fact, no discrimination, whatever, against whites or against blacks. If the association and the conferences overlapped in territory, the fact was against neither principle nor practice. If the plan adopted treated all churches and conferences alike, the National Council could not object to recognition. It was the unfounded claim of the associations to be State bodies, that caused all the trouble in Georgia, Alabama, and the National Council. If a small association of churches in any Northern State had set up such a claim against several local bodies, more recently organized, containing nearly four times as many churches, pleading that it was first organized, that it had stood alone in the State for many years, that it had been called upon to gather and forward statistics for the Year-Book, that it had responded to the call, and that while thus the only body it had represented the State in the National Council, we feel assured that its pretensions would have received scant consideration. Had the associations or their advisers been instructed on these points of polity, namely: (1) that Congregationalism, for cause, permits two or more local associations or conferences to cover the same ground; (2) that the prior organization of an association or conference gives it none of the rights of a State body after district bodies have been formed in the State; and (3) that State bodies are formed in a convention of churches or of associations and conferences called for the purpose, in which convention the majority, as elsewhere, governs, they would not have obstructed the proffered fellowship of the conferences on terms of perfect equality, but would have welcomed it with thanksgiving.

The Law of Expediency.

But it is assumed that to have white and black district bodies covering the same ground is repugnant to Christian brotherhood. Why is it more repugnant than to have two white district bodies covering the same ground in New York, or an English and a German in and around Chicago, or a white and a red in the Northwest? Theology in New York, language in Chicago, color elsewhere, cult anywhere, may properly, on the ground of expediency, determine fellowship for better work. We see the thing done all about us in every place. Why then should expediency be held to be so great a sin in the South? The plan there proposed and adopted by the conferences placed the churches of the associations on an exact equality. Meeting separately in the local bodies on expediency, meeting together in State, national, and international bodies on equality, they violate no law or duty of brotherhood. But is it expedient to recognize such local separations? We recognized them before the Georgia case came up, which virtually decided that case before it arose. If the blacks in Oberlin, Ohio, have drawn off into churches of their own, as they have, why is it a mortal offence in Alabama and Georgia for whites and blacks to have separate churches and district associations, if they unite in the State and national bodies? Why should the white churches in the South be stoned for doing what the colored people at the North have done without censure? Wherever there are negroes enough in the North to form a church, they usually go by themselves and establish one; for not only their color, but their tastes in worship, constrain them to do so. And they appear to desire to maintain their own organizations until some one interferes. In Georgia the first time committees from the different bodies met, and it seemed possible to effect a union then and there, letters from men in New York, advising the colored churches not to accept the terms offered, frustrated the offer of union made by

the white conferences. When they met the second time, none of these outside influences were present, and a union based on the same principles and differing only slightly in detail from that originally offered by the whites was adopted without discussion, and subsequently ratified by the colored churches and their association. Since that time, it seems that outside pressure has again been brought to bear on these colored churches, and they have been urged to try to unite with the local bodies of white churches. We have, however, no information that a single church has been pursuaded to take steps toward such union. All that appears to have been done is, that the pastor of one of the colored churches, after the regular time for the meeting of the conference had passed, wrote to a minister in no way connected with the district body of which he inquired, asking his opinion as to the expediency of the suggested change of a colored church to that conference of white churches; and when he received a reply that in the opinion of the minister such a union would not be expedient, he did nothing further. His church had made no application for such membership; it had, indeed, taken no action in that direction. There is no doubt that if left free from outside influences, nine out of ten of the people of both races would prefer separate local bodies.

The McDaniel Letter.

In reply to an inquiry in 1892, Rev. Simeon C. McDaniel wrote a letter to Rev. John R. McLean, which letter has been used to show that the Georgia conferences have not "fulfilled their pledges made at Worcester" "and Saratoga," in 1889;[1] in the face of the fact that, in 1890, the plan privately approved at Worcester was adopted by all the Congregational organizations in Georgia. The McDaniel letter is in harmony with that plan and with the statement of principles, made by him at Worcester, above quoted. In

[1] The Independent for 1892, pp. 147, 1486, 1487.

his letter he gave his personal opinion, as he was asked to do, on the expediency of a colored church uniting with a conference of white churches named. Like the honest man that he is, he gave his opinion frankly, and the use that has been made of his reply suggests that it was obtained for a special ulterior purpose. No overt act had been committed against fellowship either by a church or by a conference of churches. Simply an opinion had been given on request. This opinion was read in the National Council at Minneapolis to convince it that the Georgia conferences had been untrue to pledges given the Congregational body. We submit that this use of an opinion merely was neither relevant nor honorab

His opinion on expediency having thus been used, Rev. McDaniel, Superintendent of the American Home Missionary Society for Georgia, may well claim to be heard. He writes: "If Rev. Mr. McLean had asked me the question as to whether his church could gain admittance to the Flint River District Conference, I should have answered that not being connected in any way with the conference, I have no authority to say what would be done; but that, taking Congregational principles into consideration, I should think that if the church in good faith desired to unite with that body it would be received, unless there were some reason *besides that of race or color* to exclude it. For while I hold that any Congregational body has a right to choose its associates, and it is nobody's business whom it chooses or whom it refuses, so long as it does not violate God's law, yet I do not believe that there is a district conference anywhere which would refuse the application of a church composed of people who were otherwise acceptable, simply because they belonged to any particular race or had any special color." [1] There is no disagreement between this letter and the one to Rev. McLean, above referred to.

[1] MS. letter, dated Nov. 26, 1892.

The Alabama Case in the Council.

The contest in Alabama was brought into the National Council at Minneapolis by the report of the Committee on Credentials, which recognized the one small association of seventeen churches against the general convention of sixty-three churches as the State body. This position was declared in the debate to be "a subversion of Congregationalism and its fundamental principles;" and we think that we have proved the point. After an earnest debate, the whole question with the report and a substitute was referred to a special committee to report—and there was a great calm.

It seldom happens that a committee on a warmly contested question can frame its report so as to secure the unanimous vote of both sides, each side fully believing that it has won its case. This feat the special committee on the Alabama delegates accomplished. Yet the report in form as in intent rejected the claims of the association to be the State body, and remanded it to a co-ordinate position with the ten district conferences. And the Council in adopting the report reaffirmed the position taken in the Georgia case in 1889, which position we have seen is assured by our principles and precedents.

As the report was misunderstood, we will state its chief points. It sustained the report of the Committee on Credentials in declaring that under our rules only one organization can be recognized in a State as a State body. It then recommended the seating of the delegates present from the association and from the local conferences. It declined to commend for full membership, but only to honorary membership, the delegate from the General Convention of Alabama, because the Convention did not include "all the Congregational churches in the State." It then "expressed an earnest hope that the Congregational churches of Alabama will be at an early day found in one united body on

accepted principles of Congregational fellowship." It cordially welcomed to fellowship the new churches, and, finally, reaffirmed its old-time principles "of equal rights of all disciples of Christ of every race as essential to the fellowship of Congregational churches."[1]

The report by thus admitting to full membership the delegates of the association and the conferences put them on an equality as co-ordinate bodies, and by thus excluding from full membership the General Convention of Alabama, though including sixty-three out of the eighty churches of our order in the State, on the ground of its incompleteness in not "representing all the Congregational churches in the State," declined to recognize it as a State body. If any doubt should yet remain as to its meaning, that doubt is removed by the fact that if a convention of sixty-three churches could not be recognized as a State body because it did not include all the Congregational churches in the State, much less could an association of seventeen churches be thus recognized.

A State Body, When?

The General Convention of Alabama was organized, September, 1892, by a convention of delegates from the association and the conferences in the State, all being equally invited and proportionately represented. Its incompleteness arose from the withdrawal of the delegates of the association on the rejection of their plan and the adoption of another plan for forming it.[2] Had the delegates of the association stayed in the convention and carried out the intent of meeting in the said convention, the General Convention thus formed would have embraced all the Congregational churches in the State. It seemed prudent to the committee of the National Council to report that this incompleteness of the General Convention invalidated the right of the Con-

[1] The Independent for 1892, p. 1488.

[2] Statement of the Committee of the Association, p. 3.

vention to be recognized as the State body of Alabama. Is such a position tenable? If it is, then a small local body in any State can prevent the formation of a State body, or, by its withdrawal therefrom, in case one has been organized, it can at any time invalidate the right of said body, on the ground of its incompleteness, to representation in the National Council. Must, then, a body include every Congregational church or association in the State in order to be the State body? Was not the General Association of Massachusetts, formed, in 1802, of eight associations out of twenty-four in the State, a State body until 1841 when the Mendon Association united with it?[1] If that General Association was a State body before 1841, then, on the same principles, the General Convention of Alabama should have been treated as a State body by the last National Council, and its delegate seated. Any other course implies that a minority may defeat a majority. When an invitation, fair to all concerned, is issued to the churches or associations and conferences of a State, to convene in a convention for the purpose of forming a State body, the refusal or neglect of a minority to assemble or to act when assembled, cannot prevent the valid organization of the said State body.[2] To make the incom-

[1] Congregational Quarterly, Vol. i. pp. 38, 41, 43.

[2] The following substitute for that part of the report of the Committee on Credentials relating to Alabama, presented in the Council at Minneapolis, by the writer, which, with the report, was referred to the special committee, covers, we believe, the full ground, and is put beyond reasonable question by our principles and usages:—

1. That the prior formation of a Congregational association of churches in a State or Territory, small in numbers, whose delegate or delegates have been seated in this Council, does not constitute it a continuous State organization within the meaning of Article II., Section 2, of the constitution of this Council.

2. That when other churches in the State or Territory form similar associations, they are co-ordinate with such prior organization, having equal rights and standing, under Article II., Section 1, of the constitution of this body.

3. That when the said co-ordinate bodies, by invitation extended alike to all to meet for the purpose of organizing a State body, organize such general Congregational association or conference, that general organization is the State organization meant in Article II., Section 2, of the constitution of this Council.

pleteness of that State body the ground of excluding its delegates from full membership in the National Council, will, if allowed to stand as a precedent, rise up some day to trouble us and work injustice. For by it a minority may rule or ruin a State body.

An Indefensible Defence.

The chairman of the Committee on Credentials, in defence of his report, said that the churches in the ten Alabama conferences "refused to recognize the existing Association of Alabama, as their delegate when pressed said to us, simply because of their desire not to associate with colored brethren. The question then presented to us was simply this: Shall we now, openly, clearly, distinctly, draw the color line?" [1]

There must be a great limitation put upon these words. By the printed statement before referred to, laid in the hands of the members of the Council, and presumably in the hands of the Committee on Credentials, made by the committee of the colored association—and who will deny their statement of facts?—these ten white conferences addressed a communication to the colored association, beginning: "Dear Brethren," inviting it to send "delegates to a general State convention" by which a State body might be formed "of all the Congregational churches in the State," in which the colored and white churches could "meet and confer" together. This communication was borne to the said colored association by two white delegates, in person, chosen by the white churches. The said delegates "were elected corresponding members" of the colored association. One of

4. That consequently the Association of Alabama is not a State organization after the formation of other local associations, but a local organization; that instead the General Congregational Convention of Alabama has been duly constituted a State organization, and is thus entitled to representation in this Council.

5. That Rev. Edward A. Berry be seated on credentials from the said General Congregational Convention of Alabama.

[1] The Independent, Oct. 20, 1892, p. 1486.

them read their communication to the association. The association appointed, as desired, six delegates to the said convention. In that convention the four delegates of the association that attended sat as equals with the delegates from the white conferences, until they voluntarily withdrew because the convention did not adopt their plan of constituting the State body. In all this the colored churches, in representation, in standing, in rights, in privileges, in everything, were treated as equals, a treatment that deserved a better return than withdrawal when they could not have their own way against the majority. Then, too, the delegates of the Alabama white conferences sat in the National Council at Minneapolis with colored delegates from the same and other States, under a colored assistant moderator, without protest. Yet the chairman of the Credential Committee told the Council that the said white churches "refused to recognize the existing association" of colored churches! Surely, his statement was unguarded, being contradicted by the facts given him in printed form by the committee of the said association.

That the ten conferences refused to recognize the false claims of "the existing association" to be the State body, is justified by the principles and the usages of our polity, which certainly has no color line in it. That they also favored the separation of the colored and the white people into churches and conferences respectively of their own, gave no sufficient warrant for the sweeping accusation made by the chairman of the Committee on Credentials; for similar separations had been recognized by the Council in 1886, 1889, and 1892, for less cause. If better work can be done for the Master in separate local bodies, who can object, if their Christian brotherhood and equality are exhibited in State and national bodies? There is no violation of unity and love in these separate households of faith any more than in the separate families of brothers and sisters. If English and German,

English and Indian, English and English associations can be recognized as lawful on the same territory, "in order better to promote their fellowship and to discuss questions vital to their work," who can deny the same privilege of expediency to whites and blacks? Why is the color line worse in principle than other lines of separation? Surely, what may be expedient in matters of doctrine, of language, of worship, may also be expedient in matters of color. And if brotherhood and equality are proclaimed by membership in the State and national bodies, who shall forbid this expediency?

Expediency in Scripture.

The progress in revelation is manifestly that of expediency, as Christ declared.[1] What a development from the promise made in Eden to the present! The divine way is to plant a seed and nurture its growth, to have regard to environment even in the revelation of redemption. The brotherhood of all men was early proclaimed,[2] but the call of Abraham and the worship of the chosen people seemed to be a needed limitation of that principle. Our polity, while exhibiting the equality of all men in Christ, allows, as we have shown, room for the law of expediency. And God in the gift of his Holy Spirit does not frown upon the use of this law, even when one party refuses communion with another. Let us see how the apostles settled questions that distracted the infant churches. They were soon met with this dogmatic teaching: "Except ye be circumcised . . . ye cannot be saved." Paul withstood such teaching with all his might;[3] yet he treated the rite on the ground of expediency, for Timothy he circumcised,[4] while Titus he refused to permit to be circumcised.[5] How is this conduct to be explained?

[1] Mark iv. 26–29; Matt. xix. 8.
[2] Gen. i. 27, 28; vii. 23; Lev. xix. 18.
[3] Gal. v. 2; vi. 15; Acts xv. 2.
[4] Acts xvi. 3.
[5] Gal. ii. 3–5.

By the circumstances under which he was acting. But circumcision was the seal of the covenant made centuries before the Mosaic law, which covenant even continues throughout the Christian dispensation;[1] what warrant, then, did the apostles plead for setting aside that form of the seal of the Abrahamic covenant? Only one fact which they held to be determinative of it. This fact was strongly stated by Peter to the church at Jerusalem after his return from his visit to Cornelius, and, again, before the council at Jerusalem in A. D. 50. He said: "The Holy Ghost fell on them [the uncircumcised], even as on us [the circumcised] at the beginning. . . . If God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto us, . . . who was I, that I could withstand God?"[2] Then, later, before all the apostles, he said: "And God, which knoweth the heart, bear them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"[3] That council, guided by the same Holy Ghost, did not enforce the yoke of circumcision. And since God in the gift of his Holy Spirit makes no difference between the white churches and the colored churches and the mixed churches, who are we that we should put a yoke upon the neck of our brethren in trying to enforce a fellowship which God does not thus regard? Is it not better to write to our Southern churches, that it seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us not to lay upon you a greater burden than to meet together in our State and national bodies?

An Unwarranted Agreement.

In the light of these scriptural principles and examples, how unwarranted was the agreement entered into, in 1884,

[1] Rom. xv. 8, 9; Gal. iii. 17, 29.
[2] Acts xi. 15, 17.
[3] Acts xv. 8–10.

by two non-ecclesiastical and voluntary societies, the American Missionary Association and the American Home Missionary Society, respecting their work in the South! That agreement still stands; the fifth rule of which reads as follows: "Neither Society will establish in any locality a church that will not admit to membership colored persons suitably qualified, nor will it sustain any church that will not fellowship the neighboring Congregational churches, or that will not unite with the local Congregational Conference or Association."

Far be it from us to defend caste or color lines; we advocate instead what will soonest break them down. But we cannot help asking: Who gave these agents of our churches authority thus to legislate for the churches that support them? Have they, or the churches back of them, the right thus to impose limitations on the fellowship of assistance, "the fellowship in the ministering to the saints,"[1] because those saints limit fellowship in some other way? The rule is one of retaliation, not of Christian love. Does God in the gift of the Holy Ghost operate on the line of such a rule? Not at all. If believers and churches fall into certain errors, they can do nothing.[2] But if, abiding in Christ, they fall into errors of belief or practice, if they have not attained unto perfection, let us in the love of Christ seek to lead them into higher Christian attainments, and not try to drive them into completeness. For Christ, not we, is their Master, and all we are brethren. Him that is weak in faith, we are commanded to receive, assured that the Lord hath power to make him stand.[3] The churches which Christ fellowships, we should fellowship; and the bodies he refuses to recognize by the gifts of his Spirit, we must refuse to recognize. We have no right to put up tests of fellowship and assistance that our Lord does not regard. When, therefore, we refuse to aid churches owned by our Lord as his, we usurp his pre-

[1] 2 Cor. viii. 4. [2] John xv. 5. [3] Rom. xiv. 1–4.

rogatives. Besides, if we refuse them aid in need because they fail in fellowship with other true churches, what better are we than they? Are we not guilty of the same sin? We are not justifying separations over rites, rituals, doctrines, caste, color; we are only saying, and we would say it with all the emphasis of Christian love, that we cannot cure an evil in others by practising it ourselves. If we refuse to fellowship, in all the fulness of that word of intercourse and assistance, certain churches, because they refuse to fellowship in love certain other churches, we violate the same law of love. In bearing witness against their sin we commit the very same sin. Say what you will against drawing the color line, it is just as bad to draw another line of separation alongside of it. To agree not to assist churches in need because they do not think it best for any cause to unite with other churches in stated fellowship, is precisely the same in principle as to agree not to fellowship them because they are black. It is the Good Samaritan saying to the robbed and dying Jew: "You will not help my friends in need, therefore I will not assist you, but pass by on the other side." These societies have put this law of retaliation into a rule of conduct, to deny churches in need of help because they deem it inexpedient to unite with colored churches in local associations. We will be guilty of a similar separation in order to make them heal their separation from the blacks.

We thank God that our churches in National Council have taken a more Christian course. They remember that Christ died for men while they were sinners, that he has infinite patience with the errors and infirmities of his true churches, that he overlooks their incompleteness, that he builds up fellowship on the essential graces, and that he waits still for comprehension in the communion of saints; and while they could wish and pray for perfection in belief and practice, they will seek completeness by building on the common essential graces. Hence if a true brother or church,

through infirmity or expediency, pass by another brother or church, we will not retaliate by refusing our fellowship and aid in distress. Rather, their want of love shall stimulate us to show the fulness of love in fellowship and aid towards them. If there be a fault we will overlook it, that we may develop the love that shall remove all faults in due time. No other way is Christian.

But shall we not bear witness against all caste and color lines? Yes; but we need not write the protest in our fellowship, or over the doors of our schools and churches. Paul did not denounce Diana of the Ephesians,[1] while destroying so largely the traffic in her shrines.[2] His is the divine and better way. Instead of saying: "We will not grant you our assistance, if you refuse to unite with a conference or association because of color;" or, "We will not have any churches at all unless they are mixed churches," thus emphasizing the points of difference; the true Christian way is, to build on the points of agreement the widest fellowship that may be had, waiting for time and love to remove the barriers to complete fellowship. For by exacting too much at the start, you prevent all fellowship or paralyze your endeavor. It is the way of God to evolve from germs or principles more and more complex and beautiful systems, both in nature and in grace. We would force fellowship, if this be not a contradiction; God would develop fellowship from the growth of love in the regenerate heart. You cannot compel it before its time. If it be lacking, as it is in varying degrees in all Christians, the divine way is to strengthen the things that remain, to expel the evil by the growth of the new affection. Why should we depart from this method in dealing with infirmity or prejudice anywhere? Can we better it by insistence on what a very few have grace enough to endure? Not only reason but also experience teaches the contrary. But you cry: "Stand by principle, though the heavens fall." So say we.

[1] Acts xix. 37. [2] Acts xix. 23–27.

But let us not put under the law of principle what God in the gift of his Holy Spirit puts under the law of expediency. All things that are lawful are not expedient. All are one in Christ; this is the principle. All may be one, and yet not worship or work in the same organizations; this is the expediency. Let our churches admit this fact and act upon it, and all will be well.

But our Southern churches do not refuse colored people membership therein, nor do the conferences deny admission to colored churches. They deem such mixing in general inexpedient; that is all. And our Northern churches hold the same. There is no denial of Christian brotherhood in this. They, as we, hold all believers to be united in Christ as brethren, all churches to be free and equal; and yet the National Council in 1886, 1889, and 1892, recognized separations of our churches into two associations covering the same ground. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the two societies will turn their rule of retaliation into a rule of love, and co-operate heartily in occupying the fields opening before them. For the Georgia and Alabama plan, recognized in two National Councils, combining principle and expediency, has in it the Christian solution of the Southern Question.