

XIII. THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(*Y Gymanva Gyffredinol*)

NOT more than a dozen years had elapsed since the Organized Assembly had ceased to exist before the state bodies of the Calvinistic Methodist Church began anew to discuss the need of a tie which would bind them together in an organic union. A fundamental weakness was felt to exist so long as the several gymanvas acted separately, and often differently, on the same or similar questions. They differed, not on the great questions of doctrine or discipline, but in their interpretation of certain articles and their application in specific cases. A closer union between the gymanvas would aid in eliminating these apparent discrepancies and stimulate uniformity in ruling. Furthermore, in concerted action there would be a strength and power which was impossible so long as the several gymanvas acted as separate and independent units. A unified program in planning for missions, in arranging educational projects, and the like, they were persuaded, would be far more efficient under the direction of a General Assembly. It would greatly simplify the work and avoid overlapping. It would result in a more effective appeal to the imagination of adherents in all the gymanvas, and this would add momentum to the effective operation of the entire denomination.

Other considerations were also pressing. Immigration was unabating. The denomination had grown in numbers and had spread over large areas. It had churches in more than a dozen states. The number of gymanvas had increased from three to five—Wisconsin and Minnesota had been added—and there were now fourteen presbyteries. The membership in the Church had multiplied many fold since the Organized Assembly of 1842 had ceased to function. To such an extent had the denomination in America advanced in numbers, in the complexity of its organizations, and in extent of area, that an institution of some kind, all-embracing and unifying, was necessary for concerted action. Such an institu-

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tion was a necessity in view of the present need and it became even more imperative as they contemplated the future.

The need was especially felt in the fast-growing gymanvas of the West. The Wisconsin Gymanva was the first to propose a General Assembly. This-gymanva was not in existence when the Organized Assembly was formed in 1842. The first Calvinistic Methodist church in Wisconsin was organized in that year, and in the twenty-five years succeeding, 1842-1867, there were organized in Wisconsin no less than forty churches, with a membership of 2272 and a constituency—children and adult nonmembers—of 6417, making a total of 8689 souls for whose spiritual welfare this gymanva considered itself responsible. In view of such an increase in a short period of time, it is not surprising that Wisconsin was the first to discuss a General Assembly. The gymanvas of the East had, of course, felt the same great need; for they too had grown apace, although there had been large emigrations from the Welsh colonies in the East to the newer settlements in the West. Their experience with the Organized Assembly may have caused them to hesitate to propose a new organization of the same general character. The West had not experienced the trials and struggles of that former Assembly and it is natural that, under the present stress of circumstances, the first muffled sound heard in favor of a General Assembly should come from Wisconsin. In the report of that gymanva, held in Waukesha in October, 1865, the following "minute" is recorded:

"Among other things, an Organized Assembly was discussed; but no definite conclusion, to be submitted to the public, was arrived at."

No sooner had the note been articulately sounded, however, than a chorus of voices from the East was heard to chime in, favoring the project. At the spring meeting of the Wisconsin Gymanva, in June, 1866, a resolution prevailed:

"To overture the other state gymanvas proposing a General Assembly, as we believe there is need for one, and it would be easier to maintain one now than it was formerly."

Later in the same month the Minnesota Gymanva convened and it reported that "the matter of a General Assembly was discussed, and the overture was sustained." From that time on until the

General Assembly became a reality, this theme occupied the center of the floor in all gymanvas and presbytery meetings. The overture was discussed in the Ohio Gymanva at Palmyra, October, 1866, and in the Pennsylvania Gymanva in session at Minersville, May, 1867. The latter reaffirmed the action of the previous gymanva, favoring the General Assembly. In the New York Gymanva at Rome, October, 1867, the matter received favorable attention. Every gymanva manifested a vital interest in the proposal. For two years, the pros and cons were vigorously discussed in them all.

There were many questions and phases to be considered: When and where shall the first meeting be held? Who are eligible? How many commissioners shall be sent? Shall representation be on the basis of percentage of membership, or shall it be presbyterial or synodical? How shall the expense accounts of commissioners be defrayed? These and other items called for discussion, and there was a variety of opinion.

The Ohio Gymanva took the foremost part in discussing plans and purposes; it also was persistent in its appeal for an early assembly. Ohio invited the General Assembly to convene in Cincinnati, September 13, 1867. New York was hesitant, counseled more deliberation in such an important matter, and advised the appointment of a committee, consisting of one member from each gymanva, to make plans and to arrange a tentative docket which would expedite matters. Pennsylvania agreed with New York, and the early date announced by Ohio was reluctantly withdrawn. Ohio, however, persisted and in October, 1868, the gymanva appointed a committee of three to correspond with the other gymanvas regarding the time and place for meeting. This correspondence brought matters to a climax, as encouraging replies were received and all were in favor of an early meeting. Accordingly the first General Assembly of the Calvinistic Methodists in America was announced to meet at 10 A.M., September 22, 1869, at Columbus, Ohio. The delegates assembled for that purpose at the appointed time and place.

The Friend for November, 1869, gives a full report of the proceedings of the first General Assembly. Its importance entitles it to a place on these pages.

REPORT OF THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE CALVINISTIC METHODISTS

Held in Columbus, Ohio, September 22-26, 1869.

WEDNESDAY, TEN O'CLOCK A.M.

I. The following brethren were elected officers of the General Assembly by secret ballot:

Moderator: Rev. William Hughes, Racine, Wisconsin.

Stated Clerk: Rev. M. A. Ellis, Hyde Park, Pennsylvania.

Treasurer: Elder W. W. Vaughan, Racine, Wisconsin.

II. The roll of commissioners, representing the various gymanvas, was called, and the following responded:

New York:

Ministers: Rev. Thomas T. Evans, Floyd.

Rev. John Jones, Middle Granville.

Elder: William N. Jones, Rome.

Pennsylvania:

Ministers: Rev. M. A. Ellis, Hyde Park.

Rev. John L. Jeffreys, Slatington.

Elders: None.

Ohio:

Ministers: Rev. Howell Powell, Cincinnati.

Rev. John W. Evans, Oak Hill.

Rev. Thomas C. Davies, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Elders: None.

Wisconsin:

Ministers: Rev. William Hughes, Racine.

Rev. Rees Evans, Cambria.

Elders: W. W. Vaughan, Racine.

Minnesota:

Ministers: Rev. Daniel T. Rowlands, Foreston, Iowa.

Elders: None.

III. Rev. Humphrey Humphreys and J. M. Davies were received as delegates from the Welsh Presbyterian church in St. Louis, Missouri. They were extended all privileges of the sessions of the Assembly, except voting.

IV. In view of the fact that there were a number of ministers and ruling elders present who were not commissioners, a motion prevailed to extend them the privilege of expressing themselves freely on all subjects brought to the attention of the Assembly—but no vote.

V. Having thus organized, those present were addressed by the moderator in a very purposeful and sincere manner, urging everyone to be brief, calm, and discreet in all his remarks. He expressed the conviction that everyone would, so far as he was able, speak words of wisdom,