

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SOUTHERN CHURCHES.

RESULTS THUS FAR OBTAINED.

At the outbreak of the rebellion the churches of the slave states were nearly unanimous in the support of the slave power. They were fully alienated from their brethren in the free states, if not by a distinct ecclesiastical organization, at least by an avowedly pro-slavery tendency. The establishment of a central government of the rebel states completed the ecclesiastical separation between South and North. Not only did the churches which had hitherto remained in one church connection with those of northern states, hasten to effect an independent organization, but they generally advanced from pro-slavery in practice to being pro-slavery in profession. No one can doubt that if the rebels had been successful the churches of the Confederacy would soon have been a unit in declaring slavery an inviolable, divine institution.

The churches of the free states, on the other hand, have made undoubted progress in their opposition to slavery, and nearly all of them have either excluded slaveholders from their communion, or at least expressed a desire for the overthrow of slavery. Until 1860 they acted in the slave states almost exclusively on the defensive. Now, when slavery has been overthrown, together with the rebellion, they fully realize the importance of assuming the aggressive, and of affording a religious reconstruction of the South. The movements in this direction are becoming every day of greater importance. Much has already been achieved, and still greater successes may be expected in a not remote future. In the following lines we give a condensed account of what has thus far been achieved:

THE METHODISTS.

No other religious denomination has thus far operated in this field with so conspicuous a success as the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Southern Methodist Church was before the rebellion the most numerous pro-slavery church, counting about seven hundred thousand members, and after the outbreak of the rebellion she was one of the chief fomenters. She alienated, therefore, many of her loyal members in the border states, who at once began to long for and move towards a reunion with the Methodist Episcopal Church. The movement first manifested itself in West Virginia, which has never faltered in its loyalty to the Union. The Methodist Episcopal Church in Missouri at first suffered terribly from the war, but the rise and the triumph of the "radical" party greatly strengthened her. She was joined by large numbers of ministers and laymen of the Southern Methodist Church, and had many more calls for preachers from loyal members of the Southern Church than she could supply. At the recent annual session of the Missouri and Arkansas Conference, there was evidence of great prosperity during the past year. Some circuits had multiplied their membership nearly four fold. A large number were received into the Conference, some by transfer and others upon probation, and two new districts, almost as large as an eastern conference, were added to the Conference, yet many places were left to be filled by the presiding elders. In Kentucky, Dr. Parsons, one of the prominent preachers of the Southern Methodists, has, together with another minister of the Southern Church, at the recent session of the Kentucky Conference, rejoined the old church, and numbers of laymen have already followed their example. In Lexington, an entire congregation of Southern Methodists has come over to the Methodist Episcopal Church, bringing with them their church and their church property. In Newport, the principal Southern Methodist Church has determined to drop the word South, and, it is believed, will soon make overtures for a return to the bosom of their old mother. In Louisiana, anti-slavery Methodism has gained a firm footing under the superintendence of the Rev. Dr. Newman. There are three flourishing congregations in New Orleans, one in Baton Rouge, and several more in other cities, and the prospects of a reunion of a very large portion of the Southern Methodists into the old church are every day more brightening. Still more pleasing is the news from Tennessee; more than four thousand members, with a large number of ministers of the Southern Church of East Tennessee, have signed a declaration by which they declare themselves free from the Southern Church, and ready to unite with the Methodist Episcopal Church. Early in June the organization of an annual conference in East Tennessee, in connection with the Methodist Episcopal Church, will be consummated. In Nashville, Governor Brownlow is an active member of the newly established congregation. So favorable is the progress of the cause in Tennessee, that it is likely to be the first

state in which the Southern Methodist Church will become extinct.

The Rev. Dr. Newman of New Orleans was recently on a visit to Mobile, where he had a conference with some clergymen and leading lay members of the Southern Methodist Church for an interchange of views on a reunion of the two great branches of American Methodism. He found men filled with the greatest possible prejudices against the old Church. Her bishops had been represented as church-robbers, and her ministers in the South as bloodthirsty crusaders. Dr. Newman by reading to them editorials on the subject of ecclesiastical reconstruction from the two leading organs of the Methodist Episcopal Church—the *Methodist* and the *Christian Advocate and Journal*—easily dispelled these prejudices. Dr. Newman, who has probably had a better opportunity to study this question than other Methodist ministers, quotes, at the close of a letter from Mobile, the following opinion on the work of reconstruction:

"From all that I could gather from this consultation I reached this conclusion: the authorities of our Church could make overtures for a reunion to the Methodist Episcopal Church South on two general conditions: Unqualified loyalty to the general government, and the acceptance of the anti-slavery doctrine of the Church. Should these conditions be rejected, then let the Methodist Episcopal Church plant a loyal, living church in every city and hamlet of the South. And the policy of our church as to this great work should be settled within the next ninety days. This is the nick of time, whether for reunion or organization. But I believe in the practicability and duty of reunion. We are identical in history, policy and doctrines; the separating cause has been removed, their Church is returning to ours in fragments; and it were better to give to the world the example of the moral grandeur of the reunion of two such great bodies. The reasons inducing them to refuse to reunite would be sufficient reasons for us to plant a loyal anti-slavery church in every southern city to accommodate the northern Methodists who may settle there, and the loyal Methodists who may there reside: the centenary of American Methodism should be rendered memorable by such a sublime event, and before such a union and combination of forces the new world would reverently bow."

The views of Dr. Newman are sustained by many of the most influential men in the Church, and the work of reconstructing an anti-slavery Methodist church in all the slave states is likely to assume, very soon, dimensions which will greatly interest and astonish every loyal citizen of the Union.

PRESBYTERIANS.

The main branches of American Presbyterianism in the rebel states, the Old and the New School, last year effected a union. Both had, since the beginning of the rebellion, made sufficient progress in their devotedness to forget all minor differences. "The long-continued agitations of our adversaries," they say in an official report, "have wrought within us a deeper conviction of the divine appointment of domestic servitude. We hesitate not to affirm that it is the peculiar mission of the Southern Church to conserve the institution of slavery, and make it a blessing both to master and slave." The increase, however, which the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States may have gained from this union had already been more than balanced by the losses which the Church has sustained in consequence of the failure of the rebellion. In Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, and other states, a large number of Presbyterian ministers left their posts on the advance of our armies, and in many places the loyal members were endeavoring to reconnect themselves with the General Assemblies of the loyal states, and to call ministers from the North. The Old School Presbytery of Nashville has been reconstituted in connection with the General Assembly of the Church of the United States. The (New School) Union Presbytery, in East Tennessee, at its meeting in 1864, formally repealed the act of separation which the southern presbyteries of this denomination passed in 1857, and declared themselves again in the (New School) Presbyterian Church of the United States. Since then a second East Tennessee Presbytery (Kongdon) of the same Church has resumed its old church relations, and both were to send commissioners to the General Assembly, which on Thursday, during the present week, was opened in Brooklyn. The Cumberland Presbyterian churches of the South appear never to have dissolved their church connections with their brethren in the northern states. They have neither formed a General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States, nor joined the union of the other "Con-

federate" Presbyterian churches. At the last General Assembly of the churches of the United States, East Tennessee was represented, and its representatives voted with the majority for the passage of strong anti-slavery resolutions. A meeting of the East Tennessee Synod, comprising Knoxville, Ocoee and Georgia Presbyteries was held in February, 1865, when the three Presbyteries forming the Synod were ordered to resume their regular annual meetings. The anti-slavery deliverance of the last General Assembly of the Church was unanimously approved.

BAPTISTS AND CONGREGATIONALISTS.

Not so much progress as by the Methodists and Presbyterians has been made by the Baptists and Congregationalists. The question, what may be done to organize anti-slavery congregations in the former slave states, is seriously discussed by the members of both denominations. It has been reported that a movement was to be started at the annual meeting of the Baptist Missionary Union, to invoke the Baptists of the South to return to the fellowship of their Northern brethren. A "Loyal Baptist," of St. Louis, in writing on this subject to the *New York Examiner*, expresses the following views, which we believe are shared by the majority of the denominations:

"It seems to me that any motion of the kind will be exceedingly ill-advised. The Missionary Union never excluded any class of Baptists by name. It has repeatedly declined doing anything that implied approval of slavery, and such professed Christians as loved slavery have sought more congenial associations. They left the Union because the Union was not suited to their minds. Some of them have since been guilty of aggravated treasons. When they are of another mind they will return. The Missionary Union, meanwhile, will bear a consistent testimony against slavery and against rebellion. I cannot doubt that it will be true now, as it has ever been, to the spirit of liberty and of patriotism. And as the government of the United States declines all negotiations which imply a recognition of the rebel confederacy, or of the rebel state governments, but deals with individual citizens as they are loyal or disloyal, so the Missionary Union should know no such class of persons as the 'Southern Baptists.' There are loyal Baptists in the rebellious states. The colored brethren are true to their allegiance. Some brethren of a fairer complexion will doubtless sincerely disavow the heresies of secession and rebellion, and cast in their lot with us. But they will do this as individual Baptists and as Baptist churches, and not by virtue of an invitation addressed to such a sectional abstraction as 'the Baptists of the South.'"

"I trust that both the Home Mission Society and the Missionary Union will stand firm in their present position, and address themselves to their work with the utmost possible efficiency, and ask the co-operation of all who can stand with them and work with them—and of no others."

EPISCOPALIANS.

The Protestant Episcopal Church has never troubled itself about the slavery question, and when the Southern dioceses seceded, in order to organize a Protestant Episcopal Church of the Confederate States, the bishops expressly declared that they had no complaints against the Church with which they had been hitherto connected, and that the only cause of their independent organization was the dissolution of the Federal Union. Most of the bishops, it is true, showed themselves ardent rebels and champions of slavery; still, now that the Confederacy and the rebellion are both destroyed, it is generally believed that a reunion of the Protestant Episcopal Church will meet with fewer difficulties than that of any other religious denomination. There is no doubt that the Diocese of Tennessee, which is at present without a bishop, will retain its connection with the General Convention of the United States. From Louisiana, a correspondent writes to the editors of the *Church Journal* of New York:

"You will doubtless be glad to learn that there is really reason to hope that the Diocese of Louisiana will before long resume its natural position in the church, with all its functions and organizations. By this is not meant any pretended 'reconstruction' effected by strangers or influenced by intimidation, but the resumption of their former fraternity by most of our old clergy and congregations. This is what we want. Anything other or less than this would load the church down with difficulties and distraction, from which it would not recover for a generation."

Bishop Johns, of Virginia, has issued the following address to the clergy and laity of his diocese:

"The issue of the painful conflict through which we have passed, and which leaves this commonwealth under the jurisdiction of the United States, renders very clear the course proper for us to pursue.

"Obedience to 'the powers that be' for conscience sake' is the duty of all who profess to call themselves Christians. And as such are also enjoined to make prayer and supplication for their rulers, it is incumbent upon them to implore the blessing of Almighty God on those in authority over them. For this purpose the

form to which we had long been accustomed is for obvious reasons most advisable.

"Therefore, I do not hesitate to recommend its use in public worship by the good people of this diocese, and to express the hope that they will be true and faithful to its spirit in all their action and intercourse with their fellow-citizens—that the resumed civil relations may be happily maintained, and redound to the glory of God and the temporal and spiritual welfare of the nation."

This address refers only to the political reconstruction, which it acknowledges as an accomplished fact; but as the bishops themselves represented their church separation as only a consequence of the separation of the states, it is to be expected that the reunion of the latter will be soon followed by that of the church.

LUTHERANS.

Of the twelve Lutheran Synods in the former slave states, no more than three—those of Virginia, North and South Carolina—took part in the formation of a "General Synod of the Lutheran Church in the Confederate States." The Lutherans in the other slave states, especially those in Tennessee and Texas, were mostly decided opponents not only of the rebellion but of slavery. The restoration of the Union will, therefore, soon be followed by the end of the Confederate Lutheran Church. The influx of emigration into the former slave states is likely to soon add very considerably to the membership of the Lutheran Church in those regions, and no doubt need be entertained that an anti-slavery Christianity and the union of the states will find the southern Lutherans on the right side.

OTHER RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS.

Fully one-half of the American religious denominations were until now entirely unrepresented in most of the southern states. They all look upon the South as one of the most important mission fields that has ever been thrown open to them, and they are preparing to send out missionaries, and to establish, if possible, congregations in each of the states. The change of so many denominations from sectional to national churches cannot fail to have a great political importance, for every new national church will prove a new tie for the preservation of the Union.

THE COLORED CHURCHES OF THE SOUTH.

All the facts which we have thus far mentioned refer to the *white* churches of the southern states. The movement among the colored churches is much more extensive, much more in earnest, and, therefore, likely of much more consequence. The slaves of the southern states belonged before the rebellion mostly to the southern Methodist and Baptist, and, in smaller numbers, to the Presbyterian churches. They had, of course, no rights in the churches, and the instruction they received consisted almost exclusively in the inculcation of the duty of obedience to their masters. Wherever, in the course of the war, the power of the rebellion and of the slaveholding aristocracy has been overthrown, the negroes have hastened to abandon the church communion of their oppressors, and to organize free congregations. The movement already extends through every southern state, and if the pro-slavery churches of the South should attempt to keep up a separate southern organization, they will soon not have a negro congregation left in their church connection. The negroes are either applying for admission into the communion of the northern churches, or, as they cannot obtain yet in most of these churches full equality with the whites, they are joining independent organizations of colored churches. The most numerous, and therefore the most important, of these colored organizations will be the African Methodists. Hitherto there have been in the free states two organizations of African Methodists, denominated the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. At their last General Conferences, held in Philadelphia in May, 1864, both churches declared strongly in favor of a union, for which all the necessary preparations have since been matured. They are now annexing new congregations in each of the recovered rebel states at such a rate as to have the prospect of becoming soon one of the largest churches of this country, unless—what is probable—they should, in turn, find it soon possible to unite with the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the meanwhile it will be of interest for every friend of the Union to know that within a few more months there shall be within every county of the South an anti-slavery church, if not of white, at least of colored Christians, who will be as firm in their attachment to the Union as they are in their opposition to slavery. We shall watch the progress of these churches with intense interest.

—The Earl of Kintoro and a Mrs. Thistlethwaite, a wealthy lady, are preaching in one of the most fashionable parts of London. Their sermons are said to be solemn and impressive.