

holding aristocracy of the South, and respecting the duties imposed by the war upon Christians. With the same unanimity with which they have defended the fundamental points of evangelical Christianity, or combated great moral wrongs in society, they have declared, that, from a Christian point of view the rebellion cannot be too strongly condemned as entirely causeless; that every Christian is obliged to be loyal to the National government; that slavery is the chief cause of the rebellion; and that the churches ought heartily to sympathize with and aid the efforts made by the National government to extirpate it throughout the whole land.

The church assemblies of nearly every religious denomination have deemed it their duty to pass on this question emphatic resolutions. Those that had spoken before, have, since the beginning of the war, spoken more strongly; while those that had previously observed silence, have stepped forward to make the unanimous deliverance of Christian sentiment more marked.

This year, too, religious assemblies have brought the intense and harmonious feeling of the Christian churches on the war and on slavery more conspicuously before the eyes of the whole country than had ever been done before. The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which has always remained faithful to John Wesley's abhorrence of slavery, had deemed it a duty under the existing circumstances to require the few slaveholders who are yet among her members to emancipate their slaves, and to forbid the further admission of slaveholders to the church.

The progress made by the Old-School Presbyterians is still more marked. This numerous and influential body had been entirely silent on the slavery question since 1846. The language of its principal organs seemed to indicate that the great majority of the church were opposed to any further deliverance on the subject of slavery, and were willing to make to the Southern, strongly pro-slavery portion of this church, any concessions they would demand. The authority which men like Dr. Thornwell and Dr. Palmer, two of the most prominent champions of the doctrine of the Divine origin of slavery, and of its being forever the normal condition of the negro, enjoyed in the entire church, seemed to make the preservation of the former testimonies of the General Assembly against slavery, and still more a revival of anti-slavery views in the Old School Presbyterian Church, from year to year, more unlikely. Even during the last three years the General Assemblies, while passing strong resolutions of loyalty, carefully avoided any new deliverance on slavery; and it was a common expectation that the same course would be pursued this year.

The whole country has therefore taken a more than ordinary interest in the unexpected presentation to the General Assembly of a very strong anti-slavery report, in the discussions ensuing upon it, and in its final adoption. The altered attitude thus assumed by one of the most conservative churches of the country, will ever remain an event of marked prominence in the history of the relation of Christianity to slavery, and well deserves, therefore, a few additional remarks.

The report was presented by the Hon. Stanley Matthews, of Ohio—who was a district-attorney under President Buchanan, but removed by President Lincoln—and founded upon an overture from the Presbytery of Newton New Jersey. It begins with an interesting historical review of the action of the former General Assemblies. In the year 1787 the synod of New York and Pennsylvania recommended to all their people “to use the most prudent measures consistent with the interest and state of civil society in the countries where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of slavery.” In 1795, the General Assembly “assured all the churches under their care that they view with the deepest concern any vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country.” In 1815, the record was made that the General Assembly have repeatedly declared their cordial approbation of the principles of civil liberty, and their regret, that the slavery of the Africans and of their descendants still continued in so many places, and even among Presbyterians. The most celebrated of the