

## SHALL THE DOORS BE CLOSED

### THE NEW-YORK PRESBYTERY HAS A LIVELY MEETING.

IT DISCUSSES THE QUESTION OF PER-  
MITTING REPORTERS TO BE PRES-  
ENT AT ITS SESSIONS.

The New-York Presbytery held a long meeting in the lecture room of the Scotch Church, in West Fourteenth Street, yesterday afternoon and had an unusually lively session. Ten young men were examined for licenses to preach, but the most interesting part of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of the advisability of making public the proceedings of the Presbytery by admitting reporters to the sessions. On this point there was a wide variance of opinion and at times the debate was full of spirit.

The immediate cause of the discussion was a report of the preceding meeting, credited to a member of the Presbytery, and to which several other members took serious exception. Beyond a doubt, too, the influence of the controversy over the revision of the Confession of Faith played its part in the proceedings. The Moderator was the Rev. Jesse F. Forbes.

There is a two-year-old rule on the Presbytery's list which directs that only one reporter shall be present at the meetings, and that his report of the proceedings shall be supervised by the Secretary before its publication. For many months this provision has been disregarded. Soon after the opening of yesterday's meeting the Moderator announced that he had received a communication from a member of the Presbytery asking that the old rule be carried out strictly. The Moderator laid the subject before the Presbytery for discussion and such action as it saw fit to take. The Rev. D. G. Wylie moved to rescind the rule. His motion was seconded, and then the debate began.

The Rev. Dr. R. R. Booth made a vigorous defense of the old rule. From the circumstances under which it had been adopted he thought it was deserving of the greatest consideration. A committee had been appointed to consider the question of admitting reporters at a time when great trouble had been brought to the Presbytery and its members by the reports of its meetings printed in the newspapers. Members had said things without considering how the remarks would look in black and white. Somebody had declared that "the Presbytery are not ninnies," and the papers had seemed to take delight in quoting this remark and using it as a subject for unkind jesting.

Some newspapers, he went on, seemed to take pleasure in baiting a minister. Men had been worn out and heads had been made gray through these attacks of the press. No greater calamity could come upon the Presbytery than the opening of its doors to the reporters.

"Would to God," the speaker continued, "that the Moderator had enforced this rule during the last six months. It is a necessary rule. It is an outrage to propose to abolish it."

Then Dr. Howard Crosby paid his respects to the press. There could be but two ways to settle the question of making the meetings public or private. Either there must be full liberty given to the reporters or they must be excluded altogether. The half-way measure would not do at all. Having brought his subject down to this basis, Dr. Crosby announced that he favored the total-exclusion policy, even if, he added, some of the brethren found it pleasant, as he did, to have their bright sayings recorded in the newspapers.

The Rev. Dr. G. W. F. Birch believed in publicity. He could not understand why the New-York Presbytery should be the only one to close its doors, while all the others took the other view of the case and was glad to have reports of their doings carried to the churches by the newspapers. If there were need for privacy at any time, the roll of the Presbytery could be called and all persons not members of the body could be made to withdraw. At other times publicity should be given to the proceedings. Dr. Birch, however, advocated a censorship of reports of the meetings. They should be submitted to the Secretary for approval before being published.

The Moderator then put the question on the motion to repeal the existing rule. There was a chorus of "Ayes." When the "Noes" were called for, vigorous negatives were heard. The presiding officer ruled that the motion had been carried. A member on one of the rear benches protested that he had not understood the real meaning of the question at issue, and another explained that as there were candidates for licenses to be examined it would be better to table the motion which had just been declared carried. This was agreed to, and Dr. Booth triumphantly pointed out that the old rule was thus left in force.

While the Presbytery was dealing with the candidates it was suggested that there was danger of unfair criticisms of the papers submitted by them, thus doing the young men great harm. Thereupon all persons in the room not members of the Presbytery were made corresponding members. One gentleman decided not to accept this honor and quietly withdrew from the hall. It was Mr. Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, who had come to the meeting as a member of a church, but not of the Presbytery.

A variety of other business was transacted before this question of public meetings was taken up again. Then Prof. C. A. Briggs took the floor to express his regret that it was impossible to correct mistakes made in either the daily or the religious papers. He was sorry to say that on that score the latter were very little better than the former. It was hard to get in a correction in any case.

"I would suggest," he added, "that the stated and permanent clerks be allowed to employ a stenographer. In that way we could have full records of everything that was said. If the brethren knew that everything they said would go on record a great deal that is now said would be left unsaid."

"The remedy is worse than the disease," quoth Dr. Crosby. "A stenographer's report has to be read over very carefully. When I was on the State Temperance Commission appointed by our admirable Governor—"

There was a hearty laugh from Dr. Crosby's hearers at this point, and the speaker went on to explain that he had then found there was a great deal of bother in getting a stenographic report. "Better do as I do," he advised the Presbytery. "Don't mind what the papers say."

Prof. Briggs looked more favorably on the newspapers. "I would rather give the whole press of the city full privileges," he said, "than give exclusive privileges to anybody, even if he is a member of this body."

"Let reporters come here and let us be careful what we say," interposed another member.

Then Dr. Booth picked up the cudgels again. "Reporters as such," he declared, "should not be admitted. Otherwise we shall be subject to all sorts of abuse. If anybody says, 'Let us be pachyderms,' I don't agree with him. It is no slight thing that an honorable man can be lambasted from one end of the country to the other for doing his duty. The experience of the last month has been atrocious."

This led directly to what had been hinted at several times before—a report of the last meeting published in a morning newspaper and written, it was charged, by a member of the Presbytery, the Rev. J. B. Devins. The Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Hastings took up this report in a sort of personal explanation to his brethren.

"The article charged," he said, "that I had practised the lowest political methods. Such statements are simply absurd; but I have been misrepresented from here to the Rocky Mountains. The simple facts were these: My friends who voted with me on the question of revision got me to call a conference of those on our side, and we decided that a unit delegation to the General Assembly was right. There was no political trickery about this. Those who say so simply slander their brother and lie about it. I don't care who they are. To represent fairly the majority in favor of revision we could not afford to waste our strength. We settled on our nominations and decided to send out a letter containing the names. It could not be sent anonymously. The Secretary of our conference was called away and so my name alone appeared on the letter. I object to the charges of unfairness in this. The other side had a perfect right to a conference, too."

"We didn't have any," interposed a representative of the other side.

"I understood that you had," said Dr. Hastings.

"I didn't hear of any," cried another anti-revisionist.

The Moderator's gavel fell, and Dr. Hastings went on to say that it was rather discourteous to bring the Union Theological Seminary into the matter, as had been done, on account of his connection with the institution. "I deny that I have displayed any bossism," the speaker concluded. "It isn't my nature to do such things."

Dr. Crosby said that the question was simple. Had not a majority a right to decide how to concentrate its force on a delegation? Without such arrangements being made the anti-revisionists might have captured the delegation. It was merely a question of common sense.

The end of the debate left the motion for public meetings where it had stood at the beginning of the discussion.

The candidates who received licenses to preach were Thomas Baillie, William Adams Brown, Herbert Ford, F. D. McRae, George H. Newell, Gaylord S. White, Herman Jacot, and Messrs. Hudnut, Petrie, and Merrill. The Presbytery will meet to-morrow night in the French Evangelical Church to ordain Messrs. Petrie and Jacot. The Rev. Henry L. Grandlienard was elected an alternate to the General Assembly.