

THE ALLEGED UNION OF THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND ALABAMA PRESBYTERY OF THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HAROLD M. PARKER, JR.

HAROLD M. PARKER, JR. is Associate Professor of History at Western State College of Colorado.

AMONG Presbyterian historians in general, and Southern Presbyterian historians in particular, it is axiomatic that in 1867 an organic union was consummated between the Presbyterian Church in the United States (the Southern Presbyterian Church) and the Alabama Presbytery of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.¹ Even the popular history of the Southern Church, which was written for its centennial anniversary in 1961, conveys the same information.² It is the purpose of this article to point out that the union did not take place as is generally supposed, to trace the steps leading up to the anticipated union, and then to suggest why the union was never consummated.

The Alabama Presbytery of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church³ was a small body of churches, ministers and members in southern Alabama, belonging to a relatively small Presbyterian body with a rich heritage. The larger bodies of American Presbyterians were mixtures of the Reformed tradition from England, Scotland, Wales,

¹ Among those making this claim are E. C. Scott, comp., *Ministerial Directory of the Presbyterian Church*, U. S.: 1861-1941 (Austin, Texas), viii—hereafter cited Scott, *Ministerial Directory*; W. A. Alexander, *A Digest of the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States . . .* (Richmond, 1888), sect. 630—hereafter cited Alexander's *Digest*; Thomas C. Johnson, "The Presbyterian Church in the United States," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, I (1901), 76 and *A History of the Southern Presbyterian Church* (New York, 1894), 439—hereafter cited Johnson, *Hist. of the Southern Presby. Ch.*; Russell E. Hall, "An Outline History of the Presbyterian Church in America," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, XXVI (1948), 240—hereafter cited Hall, "Outline History"; Robert Ellis Thompson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (Vol. VI, *American Church History Series*, ed. Philip Schaff et al.; New York, 1895), 171—hereafter cited Thompson, *Presbyterian Churches*; R. C. Reed, "Presbyterian Church in the United States: Southern Presbyterian Church," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, IX, 230.

² T. Watson Street, *The Story of Southern Presbyterians* (Richmond, 1960), 77.

³ The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is the official name of the only Church bearing that name at present in the United States. Its name has changed through the years. From 1822 to 1891 it was called the Associate Reformed Synod of the South; 1891-1912, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod of the South; 1912-1935, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod; and in 1935 it became a General Synod with its present name. In this article it is referred to by its popular name, The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (A. R. P.). The Church was formed November 1, 1782, as a result of a partial union between the Associate (Scottish Seceders) and the Reformed (Scottish Covenanters) bodies in this country. Cf. Hall, "Outline History," 235; Melancthon Glasgow, *Cyclopedic Manual of the United Presbyterian Church of North America . . .* (Pittsburgh, 1903), 11; Wallace N. Jamison, *The United Presbyterian Story: A Centennial Study 1858-1958* (Pittsburgh, 1958), 38—hereafter cited Jamison, *U. P. Story*.

Northern Ireland, Holland, France and other national groups. But the A. R. P.'s, as they are affectionately known, were composed almost solely of God-fearing Scots and "Scotch-Irish" who came to the American shores, bringing their parsons with them. With little contact with the larger Presbyterian groups in Scotland,⁴ they maintained the same ecclesiastical aloofness when they settled in America.

HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED SYNOD OF THE SOUTH

The Associate Reformed Synod of the South, the general synod to which the Alabama Presbytery belonged, was organized in 1822 as the result of a minor disagreement with the main body of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. For about a decade there had been a growing tendency in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, manifesting itself in the refusal of the Synod to meet anywhere else but in Philadelphia. In 1810, by formal act, the General Synod "intermitted the functions of the subordinate Synods," which has been described a "masterly stroke of worldly wisdom" that paralyzed the Church.⁵ From 1811 to 1820 the annual meetings were held in Philadelphia, largely because the Synods of New York and Philadelphia carried enough votes to decide the place of meeting. The Synod of the Carolinas, somewhat removed by distance, and often unable to send delegates, protested in vain. In 1820 the Synod of Scioto, located in Ohio, formally renounced its subordination to the General Synod and constituted itself an independent synod, "The Associate Reformed Synod of the West."⁶ This left the Synod of the Carolinas, a Southern synod, as the third synod, and in 1821 it asked permission to withdraw and become a separate synod. On April 1, 1822, it was constituted "The Associate Reformed Synod of the South."

The official action of the Synod of the Carolinas in withdrawing was as follows:

WHEREAS, Our great distance from the place of synodical meet-

⁴ For a succinct account of the relation to Scottish bodies, *vide* W. K. Douglas, "Presbyterian Church in the United States: Associate Reformed Synod of the South," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, IX, 233-234—hereafter cited Douglas, "Associate Reformed Synod of the South." *Vide* also Jamison, *U. P. Story*, 11-44.

⁵ Robert Lathan, *History of the Associate Reformed Synod of the South . . .* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1882), 328—hereafter cited Lathan. *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*. Hall suggests that in addition to travel problems, there was "the southern synod's doubt of loyalty of the two northern synods to the distinctive principles of the A.R.P. Church," "Outline History," 236-237. This same view is urged by J. L. Neve, *Churches and Sects of Christendom* (Burlington, Iowa, 1940), 310.

⁶ This synod withdrew largely on the place of meeting; cf. James Price, "Origin and Distinctive Characteristics of the United Presbyterian Church of North America," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, I (1901), 97, and Jamison, *U. P. Story*, 39. A recent article interestingly depicts some of the characteristics of this synod, William L. Fisk, "The Associate Reformed Church in the Old Northwest: A Chapter in the Acculturation of the Immigrant," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, XLVI (1968), 157-174—hereafter cited Fisk, "A. R. Church in Old NW."

ing is so great that it is altogether impracticable to maintain a full representation in General Synod; *and whereas*, it is supposed that the interests of truth and godliness may be promoted as successfully in a state of separation from General Synod; therefore, *Resolved*, That Rev. Messrs. John Hemphill and John T. Pressley be appointed a committee to write General Synod requesting permission to form ourselves into a sister coördinate Synod.⁷

Seemingly there was no bitterness over the withdrawal. Upon organization the new Synod adopted and adhered to the "Constitution and Standards of the Associate Reformed Synod in that sense in which they were received when adopted at Greencastle, in the year 1799, and uniformly acted upon until the year 1811."⁸

There may have been more than met the eye in the withdrawal of the Synod of the Carolinas to form its own independent body. Slavery was becoming an issue even at that early date.⁹ The official position of the A. R. P. Church had been antislavery, which may have been difficult for Southerners to accept. It has been suggested that the Associate Reformed Synod of the South was the first Church in America formed on a purely sectional basis.¹⁰ The editor of the *Presbyterian Historical Almanac and Annual Remembrancer*, Joseph M. Wilson, suggested that it was formed of that portion of the A. R. P. Church that believed slavery was right.¹¹ For the most part the southern A. R. P.'s were not advocates of slavery, but largely opposed it. Had the question been submitted to its constituency, it would have been voted out; but the question of slavery never came before the Church at any time.¹² As a later historian indicated, the withdrawal of the southern A. R. P.'s from the mother synod came about "not because of slavery or sectionalism but because of great distance and also on account of some differences of opinion on questions of psalmody and closed communion."¹³ This claim, however, may have been a later attempt to gloss over a rough spot in the earlier road of church history. For instances, in May 29, 1839, the General Synod suspended its remaining members who lived within the bounds of the Presbytery of the Carolinas who had refused to carry out the act of Synod against slavery, which had been adopted May 20, 1831. All the pastors had

⁷ Cited by Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 239; Jamison, *U. P. Story*, 40.

⁸ Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 325.

⁹ Vide Fisk, "A. R. Church in Old NW," *passim*.

¹⁰ While the Independent Presbyterian Church was located wholly in the South, sectionalism had nothing to do with its origin.

¹¹ *Presbyterian Historical Almanac and Annual Remembrancer*, V (1863), 417. By this time the editor was seeing slavery or rebellion behind every Southern Presbyterian body!

¹² Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 325-326. The silence of the Synod, however, may suggest that many, if not most, of the southern A. R. P.'s favored slavery.

¹³ Douglas, "Associate Reformed Synod of the South," 234.

resigned and in the next three years most of the members moved to the North. Those who remained united with the Associate Reformed Synod of the South, April 15, 1844.¹⁴ It is also interesting to note that when the major courts of the Associate and the Associate Reformed bodies united in 1857 to form the United Presbyterian Church of North America, the southern A. R. P.'s remained outside the union. The *Central Presbyterian* (May 9, 1857) suggested that the southern synod had applied for readmission but was turned down, not because of any want of conformity to the doctrines and order of the Church, but "because of their connexion with Southern institutions."¹⁵ To some elements in the North this could mean the Synod's refusal to speak out against slavery, which characterized the rest of the A. R. P.'s.

The two matters of closed communion and psalmody played an important part in the subsequent history of the Church. Some limited the Lord's Supper to the members of the A. R. P. Church who were in good and regular standing; others would open it to members of Christian denominations who considered themselves to be in good standing. A mediating position was gradually arrived at: catholic communion was rejected as being impracticable due to the divided state of the church; on the other hand they rejected the exclusive theory that unchurches all except those who hold it. The official language to express their position was that "they esteem themselves, and the people under their inspection, inviolably bound, in all ordinary cases, to submit to every restriction of their liberty which general edification renders necessary."¹⁶

The other practical matter was psalmody. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of the South has insisted on Psalms being sung at worship, for the Church has no authority in God's house to sing hymns that are the compositions of uninspired men. In 1816 the Synod of the Carolinas sent up a remonstrance to the General Synod about the entire matter of psalmody. The latter court replied that it could not be prevailed upon to restrict communion or sing solely the Psalms.¹⁷

THE PROBLEM OF PSALMODY

The matter of Psalmody played such an important role in the discussion of union between the A. R. P. elements and the Southern Presbyterian Church that an introductory account of its development in the Reformed tradition, as well as the peculiar problems that developed when union was proposed between the two bodies, is given to gain a sympathetic understanding to this subject.

¹⁴ James Brown Scouller, *A Manual of the United Presbyterian Church of North America: 1751-1887* (Pittsburgh, 1887), 97—hereafter cited Scouller, *Manual*.

¹⁵ This is also the interpretation of Jamison, *U. P. Story*, 43.

¹⁶ Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 329-333.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 341-343.

Under the leadership of John Calvin the Reformed Church developed a scriptural liturgy. The Word was not only emphasized in theology and preaching but also in worship.¹⁸ The Psalms were employed in congregational singing and they remained the paramount expression of common praise in the Reformed tradition for several centuries. One of the peculiar doctrines of the A. R. P.'s was their emphasis upon the Psalms as the only words to be sung by the congregation. The tenacity with which this group insisted on the psalter has much to do with the failure of that denomination to unite with any other Church.

In 1867, the year of the supposed union between Alabama Presbytery and the Southern Presbyterian Church, the A. R. P.'s were using that version of the psalter known as Rous' (or Rouse's) Version, often referred to as the "Scottish Version" of 1650. Conservative A. R. P.'s denied, however, that it was the version rather than the Psalms which was important. "The disseminators of such a gratuitous falsehood are to be pitied rather than despised."¹⁹

As early as 1858 the Presbytery of Knoxville had overturned the Old School General Assembly that Rous' Version of David's Psalms, or whatever version the Associate Reformed Synod of the South may prefer, be published in the front of the hymnal, providing such a procedure be "agreeable and satisfactory" to the Synod.²⁰ While no action was taken on the subject, it does indicate (1) that the Southern Old Schoolmen even at that date considered the A. R. P.'s worthy of union and (2) that the larger Presbyterian body might show her interest in acquiescing to the desired psalmody of the smaller group, even to the replacing of Watts' version, if necessary.

Rous' Version came forth originally to supersede the version of Sternhold and Hopkins, which had been sanctioned by the English Church. Immediately prior to the gathering of the Westminster Divines for their notable Assembly, complaints had arisen regarding the version of the psalter then employed. Subsequently it was recommended to the Westminster Assembly that some other version be used in the churches. The version of Francis Rous was read, amended and sent to Parliament on November 14, 1645, with the following resolution:

WHEREAS, The Honourable House of Commons, by an order bearing date November 20, 1643, have recommended the psalms published by Mr. Rouse to the consideration of the Assembly of Divines, and the Assembly has caused them to be carefully per-

¹⁸ For a popular treatment of Calvin's psalmody at Geneva, *vide* Millar Patrick, *The Story of the Church's Song* (rev. for American use by James Rawlings Sydnor; Richmond, 1962), 86-93.

¹⁹ Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 341.

²⁰ *Presbyterian Historical Almanac*, I (1858-1859), 36.

used, and as they are now altered and amended do approve them, and humbly conceive they may be useful and profitable to the church, if they be permitted to be sung.²¹

This was Rous' third edition.²² A zealous English Puritan, Rous was at one time Provost of Eton. He held many other high positions throughout England.²³ It is not known whether he made his version on his own accord, or by pressure from the anti-Prelatical House of Commons; however his version of the Psalms adhered more closely to the original than did that of Sternhold and Hopkins, was less rugged in diction, equally unambitious in style, but by no means more harmonious and correct in its versification.

The next step in dealing with Rous' Version was taken by the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, August 28, 1647, when an act was passed revising it. A committee of four was appointed to do this work. It reported to the next Assembly that it had not confined itself solely to Rous, for not all of his version was adapted to common metre tunes.²⁴ However the Assembly received the report, amended it, and sent it down to the presbyteries for ratification. These courts approved it and the General Assembly of 1649 adopted Rous' amended version, and appointed it to be published for public use, "hereby authorizing the same to be the only paraphrase of the psalms of David to be sung in the Kirk of Scotland."²⁵

The impact of all this would be felt two centuries later in America when church unions were being contemplated. Rous was brought to the United States by the forefathers of the A. R. P. Church — both sides. To the true Scotch heart it was endeared by a thousand stirring memories. *The Presbyterian* (April 3, 1858) waxed eloquent in describing its influence on Scotch life:

In lonely glens and secret hiding-places its simple verses have been sung by little bands, whose voices have been hushed at the sound of Claverhouse's dragoons, or by solitary captives whose dungeon doors would open only to usher them to the scaffold. Its words have died away upon the air when a hundred hearts have been touched and bowed by the Spirit of God, as at the Kirk of Shotts, or wedded to 'Dundee's wild warbling measures,'

²¹ Quoted in Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 214-215.

²² The claim that the "Scots were also discontented with Rous" does not appear consistent in the light of subsequent history both in Scotland and the United States; cf. John Julian, ed., *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, 2 vols. (New York, 1957), II, 918—hereafter cited Julian, *Hymnology*.

²³ For a recent article bearing on Rous' mysticism, vide John C. English, "John Wesley and Francis Rous," *Methodist History*, VI, 4 (July, 1968), pp. 28-35.

²⁴ Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 215-216.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 216; Julian, *Hymnology*, II, 913.

or 'Plaintive martyrs, worthy of the name,' have ascended from the altar of many a cotter's home.²⁶

In The Directory for Worship, III, 3 of the A. R. P. Church is the position of that body in confining herself to the "inspired psalms" in the service of praise: "It is the will of God that the sacred songs contained in the Book of Psalms be sung — in His worship to the end of time. Nor shall any composures merely human be sung in any of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches." Five reasons were given to support the Church's posture on psalmody: 1) the Psalms were written under Divine influence and given by Divine appointment to the Church to be used as the matter of praise; 2) there is no authority to compose songs to be sung in praise of God; 3) the inspired Psalms are incomparably better than any human composition; 4) the A. R. P. Church confines herself to the Psalms in her praise service because human compositions have been, and are, fruitless sources of error, thereby hindering Christian unity; and 5) the Church is convinced, from the logic of history, that when the hymns are admitted the Psalms will be excluded.²⁷ The last statement was especially true, for the Presbyterian hymnal of the 1850's had just a smattering of Psalms in it.

In the Presbyterian Church, that composite collection of Reformed worshipers from many lands, the version of Rous was almost exclusively used in her worship until about 1763. From that date the matter of psalmody was before the Synod for a number of years. The issue at first was the suggestion that Watts' version be exchanged for Rous'. Gradually Watts was substituted for Rous, and in 1787 the Synod adopted this resolution: "The synod did allow, and do hereby allow, that Dr. Watts' imitation of David's Psalms, as revised by Mr. Barlow, be used in the churches and families under their care."²⁸ This marked the first official sanction of Watts' hymns in the Presbyterian Church. Prior to this, hymns and Watts' Psalms had been used in home and church, but without official sanction. "When the hymns are admitted, the Psalms will be excluded. . . ."

Isaac Watts is much better known to most modern worshipers than Francis Rous.²⁹ In 1718 he published his psalms and hymns, stating in his preface that his purpose was to accommodate the Psalms to Christian worship. In order to do this he found it necessary to

²⁶ For an even more poetic account, *vide* Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 216.

²⁷ C. E. Todd, *A Question and an Answer* (Due West, S. C.), n.p.

²⁸ *Vide* the general discussion in Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1840), II, 407-409.

²⁹ To give but one instance. In *The Hymnbook*, published by five Presbyterian Churches in 1955, there were only five Psalms from Rous' Scottish Psalter, 1650 edition, but 20 hymns by Watts. In the 1911 edition of *The Hymnal* of the Presbyterian Church there were 49 entries by Watts and but one by Rous.

divest all authors of the Psalms of "every character but that of a psalmist and a saint, and to make them always speak the common sense of a Christian." This makes considerable difference.

Strictly speaking, Watts' version is nothing but an imitation, and confessedly a very imperfect imitation. No one has ever claimed that it was a literal rending of the psalms in metre. Its author did not make this claim for it. Neither has any one claimed for Rouse's version that it is absolutely literal. It was however, claimed for it, on good and solid grounds, that it was 'translated diligently and compared with *the original text* and former translations,' and made 'more smooth and agreeable to the *text* than any heretofore.'

The version of Dr. Watts is smoother, but certainly not so poetic, unless the whole of poetry consists in something which both Shakespeare and Milton did not possess.³⁰

Thus Watts and Rous cannot share the same bookbinding. One is an imitation, the other a good translation. Better to have diamonds and rhinestones in the same display case. Rous' defenders opposed Watts not so much because it was incorrect as because it was a human composition.³¹ This had divided the Kirk of Scotland — the Covenanters and Associates holding that a hymn, composed by mere man, no matter how beautiful, but used in the worship of God, is a sin; the regular Presbyterians were not so inclined. A page from Associate Reformed history will illustrate this position graphically.

When the Directory for Public Worship was first drawn up, Chapter III, 3 read, "It is the will of God that the sacred songs contained in the Book of Psalms be sung in His worship, both public and private, to the end of the world; and the rich variety and perfect purity of their matter, the blessing of God upon them in every age, and the edification of the church thence arising, sets the propriety of singing them in a convincing light." But this was regarded as too ambiguous. It did not *condemn* human hymns as unfit. This was accomplished when the General Synod, at the insistence of Dr. John Hemphill, added the clause "nor shall any composure merely human be sung in any of the Associate Reformed Churches."³²

³⁰ Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 220.

³¹ C. S. Young, "Presbyterianism in the Early Days of Kentucky," *Sketches Read before the A.R.P. Presbytery of Kentucky, New Hope, Madison County, Kentucky, May 11, 1901, Commemorating the Centennial of this Presbytery* (no ed.; n. p., n. d.), 6.

³² Lathan, *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, p. 223. *The Subordinate Standards of the United Presbyterian Church of North America* (1906) stated, "It is the will of God that the Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs contained in the Book of Psalms be sung in His worship. These, to the exclusion of all uninspired devotional compositions, shall constitute the Church's Manual of Praise" (Worship, VII, 344). It was not until 1927 that this Church published a hymnal containing hymns.

The utter tenacity with which the A. R. P.'s clung to Rous must be understood before one can appraise the reasons why the unions of the Southern Presbyterian Church with the A. R. P. Presbyteries of Kentucky³³ and Alabama failed in reaching full consummation.³⁴ Lathan went so far as to predict that so long as the Presbyterians held their present (1882) position concerning psalmody no organic union would ever be reached between them and the A. R. P.'s.³⁵

WORKING TOWARD UNION

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America in 1863 was one of the most church-union minded courts ever to meet. It was at this Assembly that union with the Independent Presbyterian Church was consummated,³⁶ and the proposed fruitful union with the United Synod of the South approved. Union with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church was also discussed, having been formally proposed in 1861. However, the Committee on Foreign Correspondence realistically faced the problem of psalmody, and again urged the General Assembly to be in good faith in regard to its prior proposition in respect to the Psalms, and that they be placed in the new hymnal to be published on "an equal footing, in all respects, with the rest of the book."³⁷

As early as 1858 informal discussions on union between the Old School and the Associate Reformed Synod of the South, which had not entered into the newly formed United Presbyterian Church of North America, had started. In an informal plea several reasons were advanced for union between the two bodies: in neighborhoods where there were two congregations, both usually weak, one strong church could emerge; both bodies were orthodox, differing only on minor

³³ The union of the A. R. P. Presbytery of Kentucky with the Southern Presbyterian Church was only partially successful.

³⁴ An example of an adamant extremist on Psalmody was Adam Rankin. "His opposition to singing any other than Rouse's version of the Psalms seems to have been sort of a monomania." He is reported to have turned down three calls, largely on the disputes over Psalmody. At New Bethel Church (Sullivan County, Tenn.), he did consider stirring of the waters with his uncompromising stand, Alfred Nevin, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Presbyterian Church* . . . (Philadelphia, 1884), 567. Vide also Robert Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky* . . . (New York, 1847), 88-94.

³⁵ *Associate Reformed Synod of the South*, 389. The latest attempted union by the A. R. P. Church with any denomination was in 1952 with the Southern Presbyterian Church. The union failed. There were probably several causes, not the least of which was the fear of a small Church being swallowed up by a larger one. The actual role that Psalmody played is open to speculation. In 1955 several Presbyterian and Reformed Churches united to publish a common Hymnbook (vide note 27, *supra*). There was one representative from the A. R. P. Church on the Committee; however the title page does not include the A. R. P. Church as one of the publishing Churches, although the Preface states that the Church "joined promptly in the new undertaking, and appointed committees to co-operate with those already engaged in the task."

³⁶ I shall have a forthcoming article on this union in the *Journal of Presbyterian History*.

³⁷ *Minutes*, General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, 1863, p. 141—hereafter cited *Minutes*, GAPCCSA.

matters; communion would offer no bar once union was consummated. All that the A. R. P.'s insisted upon was a psalter in the hymnal, and Rous' Version was the best. Further, the young men favored union.³⁵ However it did not come.

Three years later, at the first meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, the brethren stood atop their new Zion, contemplating the other tribes of Israel. There were several, scattered, having few leaders. Perhaps they desired to join at the new Jerusalem which had been erected in the new Confederacy. That year, 1861, found five Presbyterian bodies in the South: the large Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America; the almost-as-large Cumberland Presbyterian Church, still connected with their Northern brethren; the United Synod of the South; the Independent Presbyterian Church, located in the Carolinas; and the Associate Reformed Synod of the South. Of all the groups, this last body was the one with which the Assembly could say it "feels drawn with the strongest cords of brotherly love towards . . ." It then pointed out that the Assembly already used a hymnal which contained fifty-two of the Psalms so dear to their desired-for brethren, and it proposed publishing a new hymnal with all the Psalms in it, "if that will be satisfactory to that sister Church. This action will bring both bodies nearer to the good old Mother Church of Scotland and Ireland from which both Churches have descended."³⁹ These resolutions were forwarded to the Stated Clerks of each of the Associate Reformed presbyteries in order to get the matter before those bodies as quickly as possible.

That the proposal, sent to the presbyteries rather than to the General Synod itself, was well received, is evidenced from the replies of the judicatories to the General Synod in 1862. First Presbytery received the proposition favorably, hailing with peculiar delight the possible consummation of a harmonious union between the two sister denominations "already so nearly one." It did not hesitate to point out, however, that Psalmody is the basic difference, but it hastened to add that "an inspired psalter" may be "proper and eminently adapted" to all Churches. The Presbytery favored union if the larger body will use and encourage in all her congregations an inspired psalter until it becomes the prevailing Psalmody of the Church.

The majority of Second Presbytery favored union, seeing only two drawbacks: psalmody and communion. If a hymnal is prepared, all the Psalms should be in it as a vital part, and not "just in name." At

³⁸ *The Presbyterian*, May 20, 1958.

³⁹ *Minutes*, GAPCCSA, 1861, pp. 35-36; *Presbyterian Historical Almanac*, V (1863), 438.

the same time the A. R. P. brethren would not restrict the Presbyterians to the Psalms.

"... It is our earnest prayer that it may be accomplished without damage to the principles or feelings of either party. From the steps already taken on the other side, there is good hope of the result. And there need be no hasty or forcing of progress in the matter. If we are really one, we will flow in due time and without much effort." Such was the reply of Alabama Presbytery.

Memphis Presbytery, divided by invading armies and partially occupied, many of its members unable to attend, reported that it had declined to take any action on the subject at that time. Virginia Presbytery made no comment.

Having thus heard from five of its nine presbyteries, the General Synod postponed action until its next meeting, and appointed an ad interim committee to co-operate with a similar committee from the General Assembly on the matter of improving the version of the psalmody.⁴⁰ Thus in 1862 the prospects for union between the two bodies appeared very good. The devastation of the War and the invasion of Southern soil had placed the two groups in an arena of empathy. The two major Presbyteries, First and Second, had expressed warm feelings for union. Only psalmody stood in the way. But this was to be an insurmountable obstacle.

In the next year the presbyteries had the opportunity to give considerable attention to the matter of union; but if the crisis of War had become the crucial factor which was herding the two groups together, it was also the very event which may have prevented them from enjoying union. A hint of the thinking of the A. R. P.'s is found in a carefully-worded report from Arkansas Presbytery, adopted May, 1863:

... In order to consummate a union it is necessary that forbearance be extended by both parties and with respect to Psalmody we are not prepared to authorize any other than scripture Psalms, but whereas there are many who think they are warranted in using hymns of human composition as matter of praise, we are willing for the sake of unity to tolerate their use, and therefore there should be a statement in the adopting act, or in the preface of the book to this effect, that while we authorize the use of the Psalms, the hymns are tolerated and that those who can use them in praise with a good conscience will be permitted to do so.

We would also recommend to the Synod to proceed with caution in the matter of union and not make overmuch haste

⁴⁰ MSS "Minutes," Associate Reformed Synod of the South (1869-1874), 1862, pp. 94-104—hereafter cited "Minutes," ARSS. These records are found at the Presbyterian Historical Foundation, Montreat, N. C.

especially in this time of trouble when many of our Ministers are providentially hindered from attending its meeting, and so, by prudence and caution, though there might be some delay, we may at length come to be all of one mind, and all speak the same things, and the union be consummated with our brethren without causing divisions among ourselves.⁴¹

The 1863 General Synod deferred action at the request of three of her presbyteries, but opined that "from the fact elicited in progress of these negotiations we are encouraged to hope that this union will be eventually consummated."⁴²

The 1863 General Assembly of the Southern Church listened to a very lengthy report from the Committee on the Revision of the Hymn Book. Mindful that the 1861 General Assembly had overtured the Associate Reformed presbyteries, the Committee had taken the matter of Psalmody under consideration in compiling its report, and made three recommendations about the use of the Psalms in the hymnal: 1) the character of psalmody is eucharistic and supplicatory, consisting primarily of address to God and not to man; therefore 2) such hymns as are didactic and argumentative, hortatory, damnatory, or "offensively egoistic" are to be excluded; and 3) any paraphrase superior to that of Watts ought to be substituted.⁴³

The General Assembly of December, 1865, was the first to meet in the wreckage left over from the War. Found in that wreckage was the failure of the A. R. P.'s to consider favorably union with the Assembly. The War was over, the issue of union had been considered and debated for years. ". . . After the maturest deliberations we are capable of giving the subject we are not prepared to give our assent to the basis proposed. . . ." No good could come from continued agitation on the subject, and so the General Synod respectfully declined further negotiation toward union by a vote of 20-12.⁴⁴ This was a crucial vote. It outlined the future path of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church toward union with the Southern Presbyterian Church to the present day. But it also left two dissatisfied Presbyteries within her ranks — Alabama and Kentucky.⁴⁵

DISCUSSIONS WITH ALABAMA PRESBYTERY

On October 20, 1866, the Rev. J. M. Young appeared before the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1863, pp. 137-138.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1863, p. 129.

⁴³ *Minutes*, GAPCCSA, 1863, p. 176; the full report of the Committee is found on pp. 175-182.

⁴⁴ "Minutes," ARSS, 1865, p. 192. The strength of the anti-union vote lay in First, Second, Tennessee and Memphis Presbyteries.

⁴⁵ It has been claimed that Alabama Presbytery joined the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1867 because of the failure of the General Synod to unite with the Assembly; *vide* Hall, "Outline History," 237, 243.

South Alabama Presbytery of the Southern Presbyterian Church to inquire about union between the two bodies. A committee was appointed (Presbyterians have never changed!) to look into the matter, and it brought back the following report:

Resolved 1. That we have heard with satisfaction and joy the resolutions of the Presbytery looking to an organic union with this body; and we do most heartily reciprocate the feeling of love and Christian regard expressed to us by their delegate, Rev. J. M. Young; and we hope the day is not far distant when this union so devoutly to be desired, may be consummated to the entire satisfaction of all concerned.

Resolved 2. That we overture the next General Assembly to authorize us to consummate this union as soon as God in his providence may open the way, with this understanding that we come together as Presbyterians—as co-ordinate Presbyteries, and the churches shall be indulged in the use of their Psalmody.⁴⁶

The Presbytery then sent an overture to the General Assembly stating that negotiations were in progress and requesting the Assembly to permit Alabama Presbytery and the South Alabama Presbytery to consummate the union when the way becomes clear.⁴⁷

This action of Alabama Presbytery in initiating union with South Alabama Presbytery revealed dissension within the files of the A. R. P.'s. The *Presbyterian Index* (November 1, 1866), which favored union with any group of Presbyterians in the South or Border States who opposed the current activities of the Northern Assemblies, carried an article in which it stated that "we learn that some of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian ministers have consummated the union themselves individually, and others will likely to do so soon." After the October meetings of the South Alabama Presbytery the *Index* (November 29, 1866) commented on the visit of the Rev. J. M. Young and the resolutions which he brought which stated that the Alabama Presbytery dissented from the actions of the General Synod in turning down union with the Southern Presbyterian Church, and declared its purpose to "persevere in the fear of God" until the union's final achievement.

The papers of the Alabama Presbytery forwarded to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly carried the desire of the Presbytery to seek the union to which it was committed. The two resolutions from South Alabama Presbytery were also read to the Assembly. The Assembly directed the Synod of Alabama to receive Alabama Presby-

⁴⁶ MSS "Minutes," South Alabama Presbytery, Oct. 20, 1866, pp. 131-133.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Oct. 20, 1866.

tery, which Synod will dissolve along with South Alabama Presbytery and then form a new presbytery out of the elements of the two former presbyteries. The Assembly further pledged that Rous' Psalmody may be used and it guaranteed the right of ministers and churches received to employ it in worship. Then the Assembly authorized other Synods under its jurisdiction to receive authorized presbyteries from the A. R. P. Church within its bounds without further action of the Assembly.⁴⁸ This indicates that the Southern Presbyterians anticipated that the General Synod of the A. R. P. Church would unite with it through the gradual attrition of its presbyteries, since the General Synod would not grant formal action toward union.

THE UNION THAT FAILED

Something happened. The union did not come about. In spite of the claims of church historians one searches in vain today for any evidence among the primary sources that it was consummated. In order for there to be a church union under Presbyterian polity there must be a reception of ministers and/or congregations into a Church judicatory. In this case neither ministers nor churches were received.

The nearest instance history records of any union of Alabama Presbytery with an element of the Southern Presbyterian Church at that time was the reception of the Rev. William Joseph Lowry, pastor of the Selma Church, 1865 [sic] to 1875.⁴⁹ In perusing the "Minutes" of South Alabama Presbytery it is discovered that on October 19, 1866, he and the Rev. J. M. Young were invited to sit as Corresponding Members of Presbytery, a courtesy extended to ministers of Churches in fraternal "correspondence" with a particular church court. At this meeting a commission was appointed to install him as Pastor of the Selma Church. Prior to this, on April 20, 1866, the Selma congregation had been given permission to employ him until November 1.⁵⁰ By the October meeting of Presbytery time was running out. Selma was satisfied with his services and extended a call. Presbytery formally received him, and he was installed as Pastor by Presbytery's commission.⁵¹ Notice of Lowry's reception from the Alabama Presbytery is mentioned in the November 8, 1866, columns of the *Presbyterian Index*. His

⁴⁸ *Minutes*, General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1867, pp. 16-17; *Presbyterian Historical Almanac*, IX (1867), 405-406.

⁴⁹ Scott, *Ministerial Directory*, 418.

⁵⁰ "Minutes," South Alabama Presbytery, April 20, 1866, p. 85.

⁵¹ Nothing is said about any congregation coming with him. Lowry had voted for union at the General Synod in 1865. Undoubtedly his disappointment at that body's refusal to consider the plight of the struggling, scattered congregations in Alabama led him to seek a personal union with the Southern Church by entering individually. A study of the records reveals that he is the only minister in Alabama at that time who entered the Southern Church from Alabama Presbytery of the A. R. P. Church — and he entered almost a year before the General Assembly approved the proposed union!

reception is further attested through the report of South Alabama Presbytery to the Synod of Alabama in 1866.⁵²

At the 1867 Spring Meeting of South Alabama Presbytery, Rev. John Miller, Stated Clerk of Alabama Presbytery, was invited to sit as a Corresponding Member. This meeting was held in the Presbyterian Church in Camden, where Miller pastored the A. R. P. congregation,⁵³ and who attended the Presbyterian meeting out of the ministerial courtesy. A close study of the records of all meetings of South Alabama Presbytery from that meeting through 1868 will reveal no minute of any other A. R. P. minister in attendance in any capacity. Nor is there any evidence in the minutes of the Synod of Alabama that the Alabama Presbytery ever presented itself to be received as a co-ordinate presbytery.

Further evidence that there was no union is the silence of the *Presbyterian Historical Almanac*. This short-lived annual publication is a veritable treasure house for its wealth of Presbyterian activity from 1858 through 1868. Reference has been noted previously to the reporting in the 1867 volume of the Plan of Union proposed by the Southern Church to Alabama Presbytery.⁵⁴ The last volume (1868) is strangely silent on this development. It reports other unions of 1867 in which the Southern Presbyterian Church was involved—the successful one with Presbytery of Patapsco,⁵⁵ the ill-fated union with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and it makes mention of the testimonials received from the Synod of Kentucky (which union was consummated in 1869)⁵⁶—but it mentions not the union with Alabama Presbytery which supposedly took place in 1867, the year covered by the 1868 volume. The explanation is quite simple: The *Almanac* dealt wholly with primary sources in writing up the actions of the major Church judicatories with which it was concerned. Since the union was never reported by the Synod of Alabama to the General Assembly, that latter judicatory would have no mention of it at all in its Minutes. Hence the *Almanac* would have no intelligence of its consummation since it was never consummated.

In the Presbyterian Historical Foundation, Montreat, N. C., is a volume of Thomas Cary Johnson's *History of the Southern Presbyterian Church*. Between pages 382 and 383 is found a typewritten note, which the past Curator of the Foundation, Dr. Thomas H. Spence, Jr., identified as coming from his predecessor, Dr. Samuel Mills Tenny. This

⁵² *Minutes*, Synod of Alabama, 1866, p. 4.

⁵³ "Minutes," South Alabama Presbytery, April 18, 1867, p. 147.

⁵⁴ *Supra*, note 48.

⁵⁵ Harold M. Parker, Jr., "Much Wealth and Intelligence: The Presbytery of Patapsco," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 60 (1965), pp. 160-174.

⁵⁶ Harold M. Parker, Jr., "The Synod of Kentucky," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 41 (1963), pp. 14-36.

paper bears the following comment regarding the alleged union of the two presbyteries:

On page 439 Dr. Johnson states, 'The Alabama Presbytery of the Associate Reformed Church was received about the same time.' This is not correct and true to fact. The Alabama Presbytery did not united [sic] with the Presbyterian Church U. S. only [sic] some few of its ministers. The Presbytery continued to report each year to the Synod of the South.⁵⁷

This note is certainly a blow to Robert Ellis Thompson's facetious observation that the union of the two bodies showed "the ties of political sympathy proving stronger than their repugnance to hymn-singing."⁵⁸

The search for evidence now goes to the records of the A. R. P. Church. These reveal a similar silence.⁵⁹ The Church's Centennial History, prepared and published by order of the Associate Reformed Synod of the South, and thus bearing substance greater than just a casual history, devotes not one jot to this supposed union. That Alabama Presbytery continued to exist as a subordinate presbytery to the General Synod is seen in an examination of the Roll of Synod from 1867 through 1873. While the number of ministers was small, never exceeding three or four, yet there is witness to its subordinate position as the presbytery made annual reports to the General Synod.⁶⁰

At the 1867 General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church the Rev. D. Pressley of the A. R. P. Synod was a Fraternal Delegate. He related how sad many were in his Church that the proposed union with the Southern Assembly had failed. The 20-12 vote against union had come after much prayer. The Synod was not quite ready to "give assent to the basis proposed." That basis was the guarded protection of using Rous' Version in their churches. He pointed out that this arrangement would operate harmoniously when presbyteries, synods and General Assemblies would meet in what had been former A. R. P. churches, for in such places only Rous would be found;

⁵⁷ To my knowledge Dr. Tenney is the only church historian who has questioned this union through writing. His successor at the Foundation, Dr. Thomas H. Spence, Jr., has verbally expressed to me his doubts about the union. Dr. Tenney's volume with his typed remarks has been placed in the vault at the Foundation.

⁵⁸ Thompson, *Presbyterian Churches*, 171.

⁵⁹ The only edited collection of primary sources that suggests there was organic union between the two bodies is Alexander's *Digest*. In sect. 630, which falls under the general division "Organic Unions Effected with Other Ecclesiastical Bodies," he treats this union. However his last entry from the General Assembly Minutes is 1866. The Minutes of that year merely set in motion the machinery for the consummation of the union. Alexander has no documents to support the actual effecting of the union, for there are none.

⁶⁰ MSS "Minutes," ARSS, 1867-1873. In the 1874 printed *Minutes* the statistics for the Synod, appended on the back, report that Alabama Presbytery had three ministers in Alabama, a missionary in Texas, four congregations in Alabama and 200 communicant members.

but should these judicatories meet in former Southern Presbyterian churches, what would be the hymnal to gratify the former Associate Reformed ministers and elders in their time-honored psalmody? He further pointed out that when two congregations are in close proximity to each other and union at the top occurs, there is a tendency to consolidate on the local level. They would then vote on a hymnal. "The decision may be a plurality vote; but the voice of the majority is not always just, satisfactory, or safe."⁶¹

In 1943 the Fraternal Delegate from the A. R. P. Church to the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church was the Moderator of that communion, the Rev. David T. Lauderdale. Seldom has a representative reviewed what one denomination owes another as did Mr. Lauderdale in such an interesting and witty fashion. He went to great lengths to point out how the Southern Church through attrition had received so much from the A. R. P.'s. He noted that 96 ministers had left the smaller Church for the larger one, in addition to many leaders among the laity and the congregations. He added, "We have given you a large number of entire congregations in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas and Kentucky. This includes the majority of our congregations in our former Kentucky Presbytery. We have also given you our entire Texas Presbytery with its congregations in Texas and Oklahoma."⁶² In a friendly, factual speech as detailed as this one, it is indeed interesting that not one word was said in reference to losing any of the A. R. P. churches in Alabama to the Southern Church.

Enough has been said. There was no union. How then can the testimony of so many church historians be in error? There are two reasons which may account for this. For one thing, few historians seemingly have taken the pains to work through a church union from its original basis for union until it was actually consummated—and this means worked out on the level of the lower Church judicatories. For it is quite one thing for upper courts of the Church to pass resolutions and make authorizations; it is quite another for them to be carried out on the lower levels, especially at the level of the local church. Church unions involve people, both as congregations as well as ministers. This in turn involves names. And when no specific names can be found to support the dismissal or reception of ministers or churches, there is only one conclusion which can be drawn.⁶³

⁶¹ *Southern Presbyterian*, December 5, 1867; *Free Christian Commonwealth*, December 5, 1867.

⁶² *An Address by Rev. David T. Lauderdale, Moderator of the General Assembly [sic] of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Delivered before the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly, Montreat, N. C., May 28, 1943.* A pamphlet.

⁶³ The Religious Census of 1890 showed there were five congregations and edifices of the A. R. P. Church in Alabama, with a membership of 200.

The second error lies in the tendency for the student to follow the authority ahead of him in Indian file, deeper and deeper into the morass of error. If the first of the secondary authorities is wrong in fact or judgment, then all who follow him will be in error also, for they are on the same path. They will remain in error until the primary sources are checked again. The union discussed in this article was a minor one, even had it been consummated. Thus historians may be excused for not having researched it thoroughly. However the essential methodology for historical research should still be utilized, and ultimately the church historian must hound out the facts as found in the primary sources, especially when they are available. Then he may turn to the secondary sources to ascertain the accuracy of fact and judgment found in them.

The ministers and the groom were waiting at the front of the church. The necessary counseling had taken place before the wedding was definitely planned. The service had been arranged. There had even been a rehearsal. But as the strains of the wedding march were played, the congregation looked in vain to see the bride, decked out in her finery, coming down the aisle to take her place at the side of the groom. For she never showed up—and nobody knows exactly why. We may speculate, however, that she just loved those old Rous Psalms sung too well to forsake father and mother and establish a new home where she might have to put up with Watts occasionally.

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