

**1796-1896. A CENTURY OF
CONGREGATIONALISM
IN OHIO**

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1796-1896. A Century of Congregationalism in Ohio by Delavan L. Leonard

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DELVAN L. LEONARD

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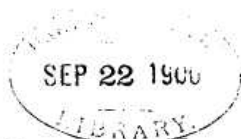
BY

REV. DELAVAN L. LEONARD, D. D.

*Prepared by request of the Executive Committee
of the
Ohio Home Missionary Society.*

OBERLIN, O.,
1896.

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Dr. S. A. Green

PEARCE & RANDOLPH,
OBERLIN, O.

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PREFACE.

We cannot at all afford to suffer the anniversaries of great events to pass by without careful observance. They bring so much of peculiar privilege and opportunity, so much also of especial responsibility and obligation. It is the part of the highest wisdom to use them to the utmost, both for instruction and exhortation, for encouragement and warning. They supply fit occasions for reminiscence and forecast, they help us so to sum up and set forth the past as to send us forward with new inspiration and added increments of spiritual power. In particular this centennial year demands wide spread and varied celebration in our churches. For it recalls one of the notable events in the progress of the Kingdom of God in this land, and one of the most momentous in the history of our denomination. It not only marks the beginning of civilization, of democracy, of Christianity in the entire Northwest from Pennsylvania to the Pacific, but it stands for the founding of the mother Congregational church in a vast region which already contains fully half of our ecclesiastical inheritance. Our center of population is steadily moving westward, is likely soon to cross the Mississippi; and already not Boston, but Chicago is the metropolis of our Zion.

With wise prescience, three years since our State Association began preparation by choosing a committee to act with a similar committee appointed by the Ohio Church History Society in preparing a suitable program for a celebration worthy of the unique occasion. The result appeared a few days ago when in Marietta, at a joint meeting of the two bodies, were read a noble list of papers upon appropriate themes. Besides, at their meetings during the weeks just preceding, the various local Conferences gave marked prominence to centennial topics. In the meantime the Executive Committee of the Ohio Home Missionary Society had been diligently considering how so "to keep the feast" that a much needed quickening might come to our spiritual life as a denomination, especially as touching zeal and giving and toil in behalf of aggressive operations, and pushing of our ideas and principles in localities where they are wholly unknown. It seemed to be every way desirable that from the Association and the Conferences, to every church and congregation in the state the inspiring and educating influences of the centenary should be carried by addresses of various kinds, which should tell the story of our origin and growth in this commonwealth, the experiences through which our fathers passed, what achievements have been made, and what still remains to be done. And to bring this desirable consummation to pass the more easily and effectually it was thought that an outline history of the century of Congregationalism in Ohio was a real *desideratum*.

By a strange chance (providence, that is) in 1887-8, soon after his arrival in the state, under the conscious impulse of nothing more definite than a historic instinct, the writer had gone thoroughly over the field of our denominational genesis and exodus in Ohio, consulting all the authorities, and treasuring up the results in a mass of notes which were laid aside with no thought of any further use. And lo, now the opportunity had come to put them to service. The Executive Committee requested that this material be arranged and prepared for publication, offering to secure the funds required for printing outside of the treasury of the Home Missionary Society. These pages are the outcome. But, though issued under such request and authorization, it should nevertheless be understood that the Committee are not in the least responsible for the contents of this pamphlet. No word of suggestion was offered. The opinions and convictions expressed belong wholly to the writer. Whatever faults appear are chargeable to him alone. It will also doubtless be observed that what is here presented is not "pure" history, but is rather history written with a purpose, or designed for a particular use. While accuracy and judicial fairness have been carefully sought, the centennial year was constantly in mind, and a style sermonic and even hortatory was not deemed out of place, in order the more to stir the minds and hearts of the reader to appreciate our ecclesiastical inheritance, and to love our principles and fundamental ideas. And, since these pages are designed for the people as well as for the pastors, it was not considered to be necessary always to maintain a style dignified and stately. And finally, let it be remembered that the work has been performed under the pressure of great haste. Should inelegancies and infelicities of expression occasionally appear, or even inaccuracies of statement, this fact may render them somewhat less blameworthy.

It would be a serious omission if two names in particular were not mentioned among efficient helpers in the performance of this labor of love. Professor A. S. Root, librarian of Oberlin College, repeatedly offered fullest and freest access to the ample literary treasures under his care, aiding materially also in searching for stores of information hidden in divers obscure out-of-the-way places. And Dr. J. G. Fraser, whose mind, after ten years of observation and research as secretary of the Ohio Home Missionary Society, has become a very thesaurus of accurate knowledge concerning the condition of our Ohio Israel, upon the least hint of desire has poured out facts and figures in lavish abundance.

No attempt will be made to name all the authorities which contain the material out of which a history of Congregationalism in Ohio must be fashioned. Records of the older churches to the number of nearly two score have been consulted, with historical addresses and church manuals in much greater number. The files of the *Ohio Observer* and the *Oberlin Evangelist* are indispensable to the historian, especially whenever he desires to behold both the Oberlin and the anti-Oberlin side of things. Kennedy's Plan of Union is a classic, only needing to be taken with the caustic pamphlet of Professor Henry Cowles written in reply. The Minutes of the Ohio State

Association are another rich mine of historical matter, as well as the records of the Association of the Western Reserve, and of the Lorain County Association. The six volumes of papers published by the Ohio Church History Society are filled with the annals of churches, conferences, and religious movements, and cannot be spared. Punchard's History of Congregationalism contains a valuable chapter (V; 167-222), and Gillett's History of the Presbyterian Church (II; 117-154). Walker's Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, and his History of Congregationalism, are helps of great value, as well as Dunning's Congregationalism in America. Besides these, the investigator needs to consult various articles published during the fifties and sixties in the *Congregational Quarterly*, the *Congregational Review*, and the *New Englander*. Nor must Moore's History of Huron Presbytery be passed by, which, with fulness of information and a sufficiency of candor, gives the Presbyterian view of the ecclesiastical happenings during the Times of Tempest.

D. L. L.

Oberlin, May 25, 1896.

ERRATA. By an unaccountable oversight, on page 26 the date of the founding of Austinburg Church is given as 1802, instead of 1801 as it should be, and so in the same sentence the date of Hudson also is put one year too late.

On page 28 Hartford Church among others is said to be extinct, whereas it still survives, though under the name of Croton.

A CENTURY OF CONGREGATIONALISM IN OHIO.

1796-1896.

CONGREGATIONAL PRINCIPLES.

CONGREGATIONALISM is the democratic form of church order and government. It derives its name from the prominence which it gives to the congregation of Christian believers. It vests all ecclesiastical power in the associated brotherhood of each local church, as an independent body. But at the same time it recognizes a sacred bond of fellowship between these churches; differing thus widely from Independendency, which so affirms the seat of ecclesiastical power to reside in the brotherhood as to ignore any check, even of advice, upon its action.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION.

I. Any company of people believing themselves to be, and publicly professing themselves to be Christians, associated by voluntary compact, on gospel principles, for Christian work and worship, is a true church.

EQUAL MEMBERSHIP RIGHTS.

II. Every member of such a church has equal essential rights, powers and privileges with every other (even the minister being not set to lord it over God's heritage); and