

## Two Church Sessions Act as a Unit.

Hopewell and Sugar Creek churches form a union, in which government of both are under the rule of a joint session. The spiritual welfare was the highest aim of both bodies. During the time of Rev. S. C. Caldwell's ministration of Hopewell and Sugar Creek churches, beginning in 1793, the pressure was very great, as at that time infidelity was felt wherever it could make itself felt. On May 15, 1793, the sessions of Sugar Creek and Hopewell had a full meeting at the house of Elder Robinson, about midway between the churches, and entered into a number of resolutions as laws for the government of both churches.

### "NORTH CAROLINA.

"Mecklenburg County, May 5, 1793.

"We, the Sessions of Sugar Creek and Hopewell congregations, having two separate and distinct churches, sessions and other officers for the peace, convenience, and well-ordering of each society, and all happily united under their present pastor, Samuel C. Caldwell, yet need much mutual help from each other in regard of our own weakness and mutual dependence, and also in regard to our enemies from without.

"Therefore, in order to make our union the more permanent, and to strengthen each others' hands in the bonds of unity and Christian friendship, have, this 15th day of May, 1793, met in a social manner, at the house of Mons. Robinson. Present: Robert Robinson, Sr., Hezekiah Alexander, Wm. Alexander, James Robinson, Isaac Alexander, Thomas Alexander, and Elijah Alexander, elders in Sugar Creek; John McKnitt Alexander, Robert Crocket, James Meek, James Henry, Wm. Henderson, and Ezekiel Alexander, elders in Hopewell, who, after discussing generally several topics, proceeded to choose Hezekiah Alexander chairman,

and John McKnitt Alexander clerk, and do agree to the following resolves and rules which we, each for himself, promise to observe."

Then follow five resolutions respecting the management of the congregations, as it regards the support of their ministers, inculcating punctuality and precision; and also respecting a division of the Presbytery of Orange into two Presbyteries.

Then follow eight permanent laws and general rules for each session. The first concerns the manner of bringing charges against a member of the church; that it shall be written and signed by the complainant, and that previous to trial all mild means shall be used to settle the matter.

2. "As a church judicature, we will not intermeddle with what belongs to the civil magistrate, either as an officer of State, or a minister of justice among the citizens. The line between the Church and State being so fine, we know not how to draw it, therefore we leave it to Christian prudence and longer experience to determine."

The other resolutions are all found in the Confession of Faith, in their spirit, in the rules given for the management of a single session, with this exception, that it was determined that in this joint session "a quorum to do business shall not be less than a moderator and three elders," and that in matters of discipline there shall be "no *non liquet* votes permitted."

We can readily infer that no precedent of this nature had ever taken place either in this country or in Europe; but the obstacles to the growth of religion were so great that extraordinary rules had to be adopted to guide with discretion, a church recently planted, that was surrounded with the demoralizing influences of war. But the people were fortunate indeed to have men in their double session who had most skillfully and successfully declared independence and made it good, although it was the wonder of the world.

This union of the sessions was productive of most happy consequences to the two congregations, particularly during

the struggle with French infidelity, and had the effect to preserve the spirit of Presbyterianism and sound principles, and free religion.

The elders were jealous of any intermingling of Church and State, even in the proceedings of sessions, and endeavored to keep both civil and religious freedom, entirely separating political and ecclesiastical proceedings as completely as possible.

All the difficulty probably arose from the fact that some of the elders were magistrates, and they feared lest, in the public estimation, or their own action, the two offices might be blended in their exercise. This was an age that required a great deal of vigilance on both the part of the State and Church, to prevent atheism from sapping the foundation of the Church, and anarchy from destroying our political freedom. we contended for under the form of Republicanism.