

questions and formula their general rule had been to avoid changes, even although desirable in themselves, which were not necessary in relation to the question of Union. In the course of the discussion of the preamble the questions and formula matters were pressed by the members of committee as fit to be taken notice of somewhere, and it was suggested that a uniting act might be the most suitable place for them. Regarding the provision for the ministry, they propose meantime that the central funds of the two Churches—the Sustentation and the Augmentation Funds—should be combined into one fund in order to secure the maintenance of Gospel ordinances throughout the whole land, while they also propose that the rules under which payments are at present made for those funds shall remain operative until the United Church has had time to consider the requirements of the new situation. As regards the training of the ministry, they propose that there should be only one college in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen.

CONFERENCE ON THE A. AND I. FUND.

THE conference between the Special Committee appointed by the last General Assembly and the Standing Committee of the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund took place last week at Toronto. The Special Committee submitted six points for consideration, of which that causing most discussion was the change of rule by which a reduction was made in the annuities of a number of annuitants. The importance given to this point indicates pretty clearly the source of much of the criticism made a year ago on the Fund, but it is not equally clear that as a result of the conference the Special Committee will unanimously recommend a reversion to the old order of things. On the other points it is understood the parties to the conference are not far apart in opinion, but the full reports to the General Assembly cannot fail to be interesting.

THE SYNODS AND THEIR WORK.

THE programmes of the Conferences in connection with the various Synods, meeting this week and next, show that these bodies, which threatened to become defunct through lack of work, are at last finding a sphere in which they may be abundantly useful.

It has often been complained that our Presbyteries and General Assemblies are so much pre-occupied with business, routine and otherwise, that there is no time to discuss and consider the matters that relate to the very life of the church. But here is a court which has hardly business enough to justify its continuance, which therefore is free to give the time that may be devoted to it for this very purpose. It is for the members to see that the time is well employed.

In this respect we as Presbyterians have something to learn from the sister Congregational church which, from very force of circumstances, has been compelled to direct attention to this matter. Their Conventions, having no ecclesiastical authority and little business of any kind, in order to keep alive have been forced to study the matter of arranging attractive programmes that would awaken the interest of their members. As the result of experience they have learned some things by which we might well profit. The chief of these is not to trust to the inspiration of the moment or to the suggestions that may be awakened by some report on religious life to produce a good and helpful discussion. This method has been all too characteristic of our church courts. In not a few instances where this has

been tried the discussion has degenerated into a miserable and useless criticism of the method of securing better returns from sessions or of promulgating some useless resolution which is certain never to be heard of again. What is necessary is that a definite programme should be arranged in which the subjects shall be introduced by carefully prepared addresses or papers and then sufficient time left for free discussion so as to give an opportunity for a real interchange of opinion.

A second matter of importance is to see that the subjects assigned concern questions of immediate and practical importance, and are not so general as to rob them of all interest but definite enough to awaken real thought and allow room for difference of opinion.

Given these conditions there is no reason why there should not be conferences at every meeting of every Synod that would be of the highest value. Our ministers and elders are as intelligent as are to be found in any other church. They have the courage of their convictions and are abundantly able to express them when they wish.

WORK IN EARNEST.

LAST week The Religious Tract and Book Society held its sixty-fifth Annual Meeting in Toronto. Excellent addresses were given by the Rev. Dyson Hague, Professor Robinson, Mr. J. K. Macdonald and others. Since the appointment of the Rev. W. Moffat as secretary, this old society has taken a new lease of aggressive and successful life. One bequest after another has come in, the number of colporteurs has risen from 4 to 11. Five native christian colporteurs are also now at work in Central China, vigorously carrying on pioneer Foreign Mission Work. We have only space to give a few extracts from the last Director's Report, which shows in a very practical way, the many sided operations of this Society, so that our readers may get a glimpse of the great work, that is being done, so quietly and successfully, for God, men, women and children.

The aim of the Society is to circulate Bibles of every kind, from the cheapest to those containing all the newest aids to the intelligent study of the Word; and more especially those containing Psalms, Paraphrases and Hymns, as may be used by different denominations. During the year many copies of the Douay Bible, with the different versions of the French New Testament, have been sold. In the past year, 7,200 copies of the Bible have been sold, and 2,875 of these were sold one by one by the colporteurs in lumber camps, to sailors, new settlers, and in many localities sadly destitute of God's Word. The cash sales of the colporteurs were \$4,653.95 an advance of \$600 on the previous year.

One great need of Canada is healthy religious books, fully abreast of the age, and thoroughly in harmony with the gospel of Christ. Books, frivolous, sensational and skeptical, are being widely scattered, hence the very great need of the Tract and Book Society, to be God's handful of salt to purify many a bitter fountain. Such books as those of Bishop Baldwin, Spurgeon, Murray, Havergal, Moody, McCheyne, Meyer, Newman Hall, and those of The Colportage Library, leave blessed results wherever they go. One living book in a careless family has often been by the operations of the Holy Spirit a blessing for generations. During the past year 85,000 volumes of such books have been sold by your Society; books urgently needed to meet the formalism and worldliness so fearfully prevalent.

House to house colportage work, and lumber camp work are engaged in successfully, and grants of S. S.