

British American Presbyterian

Vol. 6—No. 26.]

TORONTO, CANADA, FRIDAY, JULY 27, 1877

[Whole No. 286

GENERAL COUNCIL OF PRESBYTERIANS.

Seven years ago the Pope summoned an Ecumenical Council to meet in Rome, the results of which will be long felt. Shortly afterwards the Archbishop of Canterbury called together the Pan-Anglican Synod, which represented almost every doctrinal phase of ancient and modern Episcopacy. The idea of a Pan-Presbyterian Council may have probably been suggested by this later gathering. Its promoters altogether disclaim anything like an aggressive policy towards the other sections of Protestantism, or anything savouring in the least degree of denominational pride in the contemplation of the great numerical strength and organization of the Presbyterian polity throughout the world. They simply desire to create a better understanding between the various bodies included under the Presbyterian name, to manifest their substantial unity before the world, and, perhaps, also to facilitate those tendencies to union within national areas which have already beyond the seas caused the more minutely-divided sections of Presbyterianism to coalesce into still fewer and larger masses.

The inaugural meeting was held on Tuesday, 3rd July, in Edinburgh, and was appropriately commenced with a sermon in the High Church by Professor Flint, D.D., LL.D. The large building was crowded, hundreds of persons being unable to obtain admission. The text was taken from John xvii., 20 and 21st verses—"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through My word; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." Professor Flint is not, on ordinary occasions, an attractive preacher, his discourses being more remarkable for depth of erudition and argumentative force than for warmth of style or richness of language. The Professor's dealing with the subject of unity, however, was one eminently fitted for the occasion; it was earnest and eloquent, as well as logical, and retained its hearers' closest attention during the whole of the discourse. Contrasting Christian unity with the unity proclaimed and glorified by Positivists, Humanitarians, and Socialists—the unity of mere human brotherhood, he characterized the latter as a comparatively new enemy of the faith. But the signs of the times, he said, seem clearly to indicate that under some form or another, or rather that under many forms, what has been called the religion of humanity, which is just the belief in the brotherhood of men separated from belief in the fatherhood of God, fraternity divorced from piety, unity detached from supernatural root, will be one of the chief enemies which Christianity must contend with. There may, the preacher maintained, be Christian oneness where there are differences which no man can rationally account of slight moment. The differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics are of the most serious kind, religiously, morally, and socially, yet obviously the feelings to which St. Bernard gave expression in the hymn, "Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts," and those which Charles Wesley poured forth in the hymn, "Jesus lover of my soul," had their source in the same Holy Spirit, and their object in the same Divine Saviour. There is a great distance and there are many differences between the Roman Catholic Church of France and the Free Church of Scotland, but Fensel and McOheyne were of one Church and one in their spiritual experience. Saint Bernard and Pope Alexander VI., Fensel and Cardinal Dubois, were united in the Church of Rome. Who will dare to say that they were one in Jesus Christ? Saint Bernard and Charles Wesley, Fensel and McOheyne were ecclesiastically far apart. Who will dare to say that they were not one in Jesus Christ?

A private sitting of the delegates was held in the afternoon in the Free Assembly Hall, under the presidency of Dr. Crosby of New York, to arrange preliminary matters.

It was agreed to recommend that the following gentlemen should successively occupy the chair at the subsequent sittings:—Rev. Dr. Stewart Robinson, of Louisville; Dr. Gould, Moderator of the Free Church Assembly; Dr. Phin, Moderator of the Established Assembly; Dr. Ormiston, of the Dutch Reformed Church, New York; Rev. W. France, Moderator of the United Presbyterian Synod; Dr. Fisch, of Paris; Principal Owen, of Canada; Dr. Dykes, of London; Professor Kerr, of Pittsburg; Rev. Mr. Bell, of the Irish Presbyterian Church.

Lord Kinross moved in a commendatory speech that the sermon delivered by Professor Flint be printed and published. Dr. McCosh, New York, said he would not object to the motion, but he wished to guard himself by stating that he did not agree with all the statements made in the sermon. The motion was agreed to, with this objection.

Dr. Andrew Thomson moved a vote of thanks to Professor Blaikie for his great labours in making the arrangements for the meeting of the General Council, which was unanimously adopted.

The members lunched together in the Douglas Hotel. There was a large attendance. Mr. John Cowan, of Beeslaok, presided, and in a few fitting sentences welcomed the delegates to Edinburgh. Dr. Hage, Richmond, responded. This was done in the happiest manner by this eloquent representative of the American polity.

In the evening a public reception of the delegates was held in the Museum of Science

and Art, when the Lord Provost, as representing the citizens of Edinburgh, presided. Between five and six thousand were present. The Assemblage was a very brilliant one, the company being attired in evening dress. The band of the 78th Highlanders, with their pipers, played selections of appropriate music. The foreign delegates walked in procession through lines of ladies and gentlemen to the head of the hall, where Lord Provost Falshaw and Lady Falshaw held a reception.

The Lord Provost having taken the chair, devotional exercises were engaged in. He then addressed a few words of hearty welcome to the delegates, and best wishes for the success of the Council in their meeting.

Lord Balfour spoke of the bond of sympathy which united them. What we desire, he said, is that those barriers of mistrust and misunderstanding which are too apt to arise amongst us shall be broken down. All these things we think we can attain by meeting together in counsel and in conference, and such being our common aim and our common ends, I have simply to ask you to join with me in wishing that the Council which has been inaugurated today in order may be continued in harmony and ended in peace, alike to the glory of God and the honor of Presbyterianism throughout the world. (Applause.)

Dr. W. Adams, New York, thanked the meeting for their hearty and cordial welcome. We claim, he said, the Scottish Church as the ancestor of the Church in America. It is your privilege in Scotland to hold the ancestral places to which we resort; but we of America represent the results of those events which have a common origin for us all. In Scotland you hold Greyfriars and the tombstones where the Covenanters signed their Solemn League; but the spirit of the Covenanters is walking over all the continent of America. In Scotland you possess the pulpit of John Knox, but the spirit of Knox lives in America. You have in your Antiquarian Museum that singular projectile—that stool which Jenny Geddes flung at the head of the Dean of Edinburgh; but the reverberations of the singular shot of that great revolution are rolling on at this day beyond the Rocky Mountains. (Applause.) Dr. Adams concluded by again thanking their lordships and the meeting for the kind welcome which they had extended to the strangers.

Dr. Plumer, South Carolina, was next introduced. He said—I come from a country that is under a Republican form of Government, but I am ready to say, and I glory in saying, that in the matter of salvation I am a Monarchist. I am for Jesus on the throne of the universe, and on the throne of all hearts in the universe. I am thus far a Monarchist. I trust that we are all ready to follow that blessed Jesus. As I came into this hall, a man standing in the other room called the roll-call of the nations—Switzerland, France, America, etc.; but the time shall come when the roll-call of the nations shall go round the world in sounds even more glad than they are hearing this evening. I am in your country now for the first time for about a week, and I sympathize with my honored brother and friend from America in saying that he did not come here specially to see your noble palaces. I came to see the Scotch people and the people of other lands whom I might have the opportunity of meeting. I cordially thank you on the part of the delegation to which I belong for your magnificent reception. (Applause.)

Professor Monod, Montauban, said—I stand here with some of my friends in the name of the Established Reformed Church of France, of that old Huguenot Church—(loud applause)—which, of all Protestant Churches, I will not say has been the most faithful and most pious, but which has suffered most for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. (Applause.) In name of that Church I thank you most cordially for the kind Christian welcome we have received from you. It is really a great blessing, coming from a strange land into a city like this, to find immediately as it were on stepping from the railroad such a meeting as this—a meeting of friends and brethren in Christ. We feel here the reality of that spiritual unity of which we heard this morning such true and serious things told us. While thanking you, I have to tell you that we come to you with open hearts, and we feel at one with you as the sons of Knox and Calvin, one in supporting the standards and doctrines of the Reformation, one in maintaining the independence of the Church in which Christ, and Christ alone, is head and governor. (Applause.)

Dr. Pressense, Paris, who was interpreted by Dr. Fisch, New York, said—It is with deep emotion that I for the first time visit a country so historical as this, and where were fought and won the greatest battles of civil and religious liberty—a country where the great battle of the Reformation was fought with such a measure of energy, heroism, and success. It is a great encouragement to see here unfurled the flag of Evangelical liberty, whilst we are obliged in France to carry it in an obscure way. I am happy to see this great Church of the Reformation, this great Presbyterian Church, which unites in such a beautiful and marvellous way unity and liberty, coming together and forming a great confederacy. (Applause.)

Professor Balogh, from Hungary, said that, along with sixteen brethren, he had been appointed by the ancient Hungarian Church as delegates to the Presbyterian Council, but owing to the derangement of affairs consequent on the war in their neighborhood they were prevented coming. The speaker proceeded to give some interesting details concerning his Church, and concluded by saying that the Hungarian Church opened its bosom to the sunbeams, since their Church willingly received all healthful influences. (Applause.)

Principal Snodgrass, Kingston, said—In the name of the delegates from the British colonies I am my privilege cordially to re-

spond to the generous words of welcome which have been addressed to us. We rejoice with you in the precious heritage of a common faith and the indissoluble bonds of brotherhood in Christ, in whom, if I may be permitted to paraphrase the apostle saying, there is neither Australian nor European, American nor African, nor English, Irish, nor Scotch, but in Him we are all one. Our fervent prayer is, and ever will be, that this General Council may, with the blessing of God, be the means of helping us to more fully realize this Christian oneness. (Applause.)

Dr. McCosh, Princeton, New Jersey, proposed a vote of thanks to the Lord Provost and Lady Falshaw.

The Lord Provost having returned thanks, the company joined in singing a portion of the 72nd Psalm, after which the benediction was pronounced by the Rev. Sir Henry Woodwood Memorial. The proceedings were brought to a close shortly after 11 o'clock.

WEDNESDAY, July 4th.

This morning, at half past ten o'clock, the first public sitting of the General Presbyterian Council was held in the Free Assembly Hall. Dr. Stuart Robinson, Louisville, the chairman for the sitting, constituted the Council. There was a very large attendance.

The chairman announced that the subject for that morning was "The Harmony of the Reformed Confessions," and it would be opened with a paper by Dr. Schaff, of New York.

Dr. Schaff, speaking extempore, proceeded to deliver an address on "The Consensus of the Reformed Confessions." He began with a rapid sketch of the history of Confessions, pointing out as the key to their interpretation that they were framed in view of the errors of Romanism, as the early Christian apologies were directed against Paganism. He pointed out in detail that they taught substantially one system of doctrine, and maintained that there was fully as much harmony—among the sixteen different Confessions of the Reformed Church as there is in the lower but more widely irreconcilable standards of the infallible Church of Rome. They unanimously taught that the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only infallible rule of the Christian faith and practice in opposition to the Roman principle of ecclesiastical tradition. In theology and Christology the Reformed symbols were Ecumenical, endorsing the doctrine of the unity and tri-personality of God, the central fact of the incarnation and the Divine-human constitution of Christ's person. In anthropology the Reformers followed the Augustinian system, teaching the total depravity of human nature in consequence of Adam's fall, and the absolute freedom and sufficiency of Divine grace. In ecclesiology and sacramentology they were Calvinistic. He then referred to the points of difference as to the mode of inspiration, the general theological standpoint, and more especially the doctrines of reprobation and infant salvation, and the political articles of the Creeds. The allotted time being exhausted he could only name these. On the latter point he noticed the revolution that has taken place in the feeling of the Reformed Churches since the Confessions were passed, as to the duty of the civil magistrate to punish men for heresy. That doctrine was now repudiated at any rate in all the Anglo-Saxon Churches, who now hold that conscience is a sacred domain over which God alone is Lord, and that while the civil magistrate is bound to protect all its subjects in their rights of conscience and rights of public worship, it has no right to interfere with their religious convictions, which must be spiritually punished for their wrong by the censures of the Church. In conclusion, he said—"A creed is a response of man to the questions of God, but God's Word is better than the confession of it, and without faith the best confession is but 'as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.' Much as we esteem doctrinal unity, there is a higher unity—the unity of spiritual life, the unity of faith, the unity of love, which binds us to Christ and to all who love Him, of whatever denomination or creed. Let us, with Peter or Thomas, confess Christ first, and Christ last, and let our confession be an act of worship, an act of personal and collective self-consecration to Him who saved us from sin and death, and leads us to immortality and glory. Let us not forget what the most logical and the most theological of all inspired apostles says, that now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; that now we know in part, but then we shall know in full, even as we are known. 'And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.'"

Professor Godot, Neuchatel, spoke in French, the substance of his address being that the teaching of the profession of faith of the Presbyterian Churches in the nineteenth century and the Confession of Faith of the sixteenth century had for the central point the election of grace, or what was understood as identical with justification by faith. The chief point of their present profession was the real, personal, true, essential divinity of Christ our Lord and Saviour. And if the Presbyterian Church should to-day give out one of those great signs of life that are called Confessions of Faith, this point of the divinity of our Lord must be an essential point in it.

Rev. Mr. Osnin, Edinburgh, was then called on to present a paper on the same subject by Professor Kraft, Bonn. His paper commenced by stating that one section of the Reformed Confessions puts the principle of Scripture foremost, to express thereby that the whole doctrine and all the institutions of the Church are to be considered in the light of Holy Scripture, as the one and only source of knowledge and the supreme standard. But another starts

from the article "De Deo," and in its succeeding arrangement of topics seeks to follow the Ecumenical Confessions of the Catholic Church, in order to show the harmony and connection of the Reformed Churches, which arose out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, with those oldest testimonies. The Consensus adopts the latter arrangement, because the tendency of the Reformed Church to universality in the Confessions asserts itself as the prominent and prevailing one. The paper necessarily trod over much the same ground which Professor Schaff had traversed. Professor Kraft gave his ideas of the consensus in a series of thirty-one articles, which have greater distinctness to the views held by all the Reformed Churches.

The Rev. Principal Brown, Aberdeen, said he had been asked to break the ground for a little discussion or conversation upon the topic of these questions. He confined his remarks almost entirely to well-deserved compliments of the previous speakers. The remarks with which he closed on the superiority and reality of Protestant unity over the tyrannical apparent but really hollow unity of the Church of Rome excited the hearty approval of the House. Let them ever bear in mind, he said, that the aggressive principle of Christianity was the true conservative element in it, and in proportion as they went forward they were able to conserve what they possessed; if they ceased to be aggressive they ceased to be conservative, and, as the Apostle Paul says, "steadfast, unmovable"—that was the conservative principle—"always abounding"—that was the aggressive principle, and the two must go together. Our Lord, when He was ascending, committed two functions to the Church; one was missionary and the other pastoral. They could not have the materials for pastoral work until they had found them by the means of the missionary, and he feared that if the Protestant Churches at the time of the Reformation failed in one thing it was in this, that they addressed themselves chiefly to the second, and did not realize sufficiently the great obligation to evangelize the world. (Applause.) He desired they thought they had enough to do in the meantime to struggle into existence, but he believed they would have succeeded in that better if at the same time they had gone forth upon a dark world with Christianity in their hands. It remained, however, for the Church of Rome by its Jesuit missions to call the attention of the Protestant Churches to that great duty. Well, they ought to be aggressive if anything at all. Let them bear in mind that it is by pouring the health of Christianity into the festering sores of the world, of sin and heathen darkness, that they were to be the instruments of real good. (Applause.)

Professor Candlish, Glasgow Free Church College, followed with some interesting historical statements, showing the consciousness in the early Reformed Churches of the harmony among their Confessions by the use in Scotland at one time of the Catechism of Geneva, drawn up by Calvin, and afterwards in a similar manner of the Catechism of Heidelberg. He suggested that in some way the sense still prevailing of the harmony of the Confessions should be brought out by a statement prepared by a Committee of the Council, as it was most important not only that that harmony should exist, but that it should be seen and felt to exist.

Dr. Marshall Lang, Glasgow, threw out a caution against a restless "nagging" spirit in raising discussions on the question of creeds, and warned the Churches generally of the deep responsibility attaching to any Church which should raise the question of revision without a thorough understanding of the whole matter as related to the theology of all the Reformed Churches, and who, by its own denominational action, should break upon this harmony. He trusted that the Churches of the Reformation would hold and keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and meantime this might be their motto—"Wherever we have already attained let us walk upon the same rule, let us mind the same thing." (Applause.)

Mr. Alexander Taylor Innes, advocate, Edinburgh, remarking upon the practical suggestions thrown out by the other speakers, and of the caution necessary in taking such practical action, proposed that it should be remitted to the Arrangements Committee to appoint a sub-committee to obtain information upon the existing creeds and Confessions of the Churches composing the Council; what have been their previous Confessions, with any modifications thereupon; what are the various formulas of subscription, and how far individual adherence to these creeds by subscription or otherwise has been required from ministers, elders, or other office-bearers.

Principal Tulloch, of St. Andrews, seconded this motion.

Dr. Begg, Edinburgh, referred to some of the statements that had been made and apparently accepted. "Every age had its own theology." The theology of the world, he believed, had been the same since the days of Eden—since the first proclamation of Divine truth. It had gradually been developed until the canon of Scripture was complete; but the canon of Scripture being complete, he believed it was all there. They might have a more thorough investigation of that canon, but he believed the idea of their having a new theology at every stage was a thorough blunder. He found the resurrection of old errors, and he found a revolt against Divine authority and the Divine Word to a greater or less extent; but as to a new theology, and especially a new theology for every period of their history, it seemed to him the most extravagant statement that possibly could be made. He recommended that the motion be sent to a committee to be reported upon.

Dr. Ormiston, New York, thought they could not but agree with Dr. Begg, that as the whole human race was in Eden, so was all human theology, but as they had multiplied and grown, Dr. Begg could not deny that the germinal promise had spread out, century after century, into a glorious Revelation. The motion was then remitted to the Business Committee, and the Council adjourned for luncheon.

AFTERNOON SEDERUNT.
The Council resumed its sittings in the afternoon at half past two o'clock—Dr. Gould, Edinburgh, presiding. After devotions, the chairman called on Dr. Prime, joint-convenor, to submit a report by the Business Committee, which, after noting the forthcoming papers to be read, mentioned that the committee, at the desire of Dr. Dykes, proposed to substitute the name of Mr. Campbell, of Geelong, for his, as chairman of the meeting, next Monday.

Dr. Dykes said he had pleasure in making that request for two reasons. First, because the Australian colonies formed the most distant part of the Presbyterian world represented here; and, second, because the brethren who were nominated by one of the Australian Churches last year underwent an extreme disappointment, and he might almost say mortification, in coming such a long distance in the hope of finding a Council, only to ascertain that the meeting had been postponed. It appeared to him and his friends, and his fellow delegates of England, it would be a very desirable and proper thing that one of these Australian brethren who had shown such an interest in this gathering, should have the preference. (Applause.)

The proposition was agreed to. Professor Cairns, Edinburgh, introduced a discussion on the subject of the "Principles of Presbyterianism." After contrasting Presbyterianism with Episcopacy and other forms, he laid down the following propositions:—(1.) The principle of Presbyterianism maintains the authority of other elders to rule along with teachers. This is not altogether confined, especially in later times, to Presbyterian Churches. This principle is characteristic of Presbyterianism, which from the first has incorporated it with its constitution, and by formal ordination—generally for life—of merely ruling elders to the spiritual oversight of the Church, along with teachers, has borne a great witness to the universal priesthood of believers and to the variety of gifts in the Church of Christ. The presence of ruling elders, chosen by the Christian people, in all public administration, their parity in rule with all other presbyters, and their investiture with every spiritual function short of laboring in the Word and doctrine, gives to Presbyterianism a broad basis in Christian sympathy, and meets a want universally confessed, though sometimes otherwise supplied, in the Church of Christ. (2.) The second distinctive principle of Presbyterian government as contrasted with Episcopacy, is the equal rank of all Church rulers. After proving these propositions from the history of the Church in all ages and from the New Testament, he summed up by showing that—First, Presbyterianism is best fitted to conserve and extend Scripture truth. Everything in the Church of Christ connected with the formation of its creed, the admission of its members, the education, licence, and teaching of its ministers, and the bearing of its public acts, as affecting the truth of God, is thus matter of universal interest and debate, and the ordinary procedure of its courts affords innumerable opportunities of witnessing for truth and resisting defection, such as do not exist under other forms of government. Second, Presbytery is fitted to secure Christian liberty. It needs, indeed, Christian materials to begin with. For the general Christian mind—needing at once liberty and order—the prompting of impulse, and yet the shaping of law—the sense of individual responsibility, and yet the cohesion of great organization—no system seems so suitable. It is rich enough to bring out different ministries, finance, rule, teaching—not in one ascending line like Episcopacy, but all abreast—so that it promotes liberty by cultivating a wide public spirit, while it opens a way to every Church member to every court, not only with a chartered right of defence, but with every suggestion for the common good; and yet it secures beyond Congregationalism the largest range of council, the fullest maturity of discussion, and the weightiest voice of judgment by which order and stability can be guaranteed. In this, as has often been remarked, it resembles constitutional and representative government.

Dr. A. A. Hodge next read a paper entitled "Presbyterianism in Relation to the Wants and Tendencies of the Day." He said that this embraced two distinct subjects, each of which might legitimately claim the attention of the present Council—(1) How and with what specific readjustments is Presbyterianism, as a concrete form of ecclesiastical organization, adapted to the great work of evangelizing the world under the conditions of modern society? and (2) What is the significance and importance of the great principles embodied in historical Presbyterianism in their bearing upon moral and social and political interests of men under the peculiar conditions of modern society? He confined his remarks to the consideration of the second question, and which he considered under three heads—(1) Of the principles which constitute the essence of Presbyterianism; (2) of those general characteristics of modern society which determine its relation to Christianity, and the influence of the present stage of transition upon the future moral and religious destiny of the race; and (3.) of the vital importance of Presbyterian principles to the welfare of human society under its modern conditions.

(To be continued.)