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Canada Presbyterian.

Edited by REV WM INGALLS

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Edited by Rev. Wm. Ingalls.

TORONTO, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1880.

We wish it to be noted that our club rates do not apply to the city of Toronto. It is to be regretted that there is necessity for making this exception; but the fact of our having to deliver by carrier boy to Toronto subscribers, or pay one cent postage on each paper, compels the adoption of this rule.

IS THE CONFESSION OF FAITH EITHER ANCIENT OR OBSOLETE?

A GREAT deal of very foolish and very feeble talk has for a long time past been indulged in, often by those who ought to have known better, in reference to the folly and futility of creeds and confessions as well as about the absurdity and unwisdom of people in the nineteenth century with all the gathered knowledge and experience of the past at their command, allowing themselves to be cribbed, cabined and confined by what was thought out and formulated by men far less favourably circumstanced, and with dispositions, feelings and acquirements far less likely to lead them to a full, satisfactory and harmonious view of divine truth. Ever and anon we are treated to the well-worn saw about new wine in old bottles, with, at intervals, the hackneyed and not very intelligent refrain about "the Bible and the Bible alone" being the true and only Confession of Faith which is worthy of either recognition or acceptance. Do these good friends really know what they are saying? or have they considered at all deliberately the conclusions in which they are inevitably landed, if they follow out their principles with the smallest amount of either reason or logic? Is it possible even to think of an intelligent man exercising his mind at all on religious truth, as that is made known in the Bible, without his forming for himself a Confession of Faith of some kind or other, and that in a very distinct and intelligible sense separate from and yet indissolubly connected with what he regards as the Word of God? We do not pretend either to think or judge for others, but so far as we can see such an idea is unthinkable and absurd. Wherever it is possible to form two opinions on any matter of fact or

sentiment, and wherever the one opinion is adopted and the other set aside, is it not evident that there a creed has been formulated and so far proclaimed? The only difference between one man and another, and between one Church and another in this respect is, that the one may have his "credo" reduced to writing, while the other allows it to float more or less indeterminate in mere spoken speech. In the one case, however, quite as much as in the other the "creed" is there, and it would be difficult to shew what special advantage the latter has over the former, while it would take neither great wisdom nor great learning to point out the special drawbacks attachable to that which had neither the definiteness, accessibility nor accuracy in the very nature of the case to be found in any statement carefully and prayerfully reduced to writing. If it be said that an unwritten creed is always convenient, inasmuch as it allows every individual to form a new one every day or every hour for himself, and leaves it a matter of difficulty for any two persons to determine whether or not they are substantially at one about that which the Divine Being has revealed as a guide to glory, honour and immortality, the point may be conceded, though whether it be really creditable to the unwritten plan is a great deal more than questionable. Besides, this does not in the slightest degree get quit of the fact that if a man think at all about the Bible and its contents he can't help making a something which is as thoroughly a man-formed *credo*, as the Confession of Faith, the Thirty-nine Articles, or any other similar document which could be mentioned. Have the Baptists no creed? Have the Congregationalists? Have the Agnostics? Have the Sceptics? Have even the Atheists? Of course they have. They can't help themselves if they think at all, and whether they hold up the Bible and proclaim it as their only Confession of Faith, or cast it away as the sum of all the villainies, they alike proclaim their *credos*, and for the matter of that walk as much in fetters as does the man who has his confession all written out and who has set to his seal that this and not that is the message which God has sent to his soul.

Is it said that with a written statement of faith there is no room for growth and no opportunity for change? Isn't there? Why not? For no reason that we can see which does not very gratuitously and, we may add, very offensively reflect upon the honesty or courage, or both, of those who not only state in words what may be the character and extent of their religious beliefs, but who have reduced these to writing, that all may fairly know what they are, and may study and adopt or refute them as they best may. It is said that the written creed is in danger of becoming merely traditional, and that to a far greater extent than the merely verbal one. We can only reply that this does not appear so very self-evident in the abstract, and that as a mere matter of fact it will be difficult to shew that it has actually occurred. It is very easy to talk with more or less slipperiness about the dominating and disastrously cramping influence of sixteenth century theology or seventeenth century creeds, but what does it all amount to? and what does it all imply? Simply this, that succeeding generations have not thought for themselves, but have helplessly accepted what they never examined, and dishonestly endorsed what they never understood or, understanding, never believed? Is this the case? Has this been the history of the Confession of Faith and its adherents? That some, nay many, have accepted it with little or no examination, is beyond reasonable question, just as many have in like manner adopted their fathers' unwritten creed or held opinions on religious matters too vague and indistinct to be called "creeds" at all. But has this been the case with the great mass of those who have solemnly received it as the confession of their faith? and have these adopted it as the confession of their fathers' faith rather than their own? In times of great religious declension and abounding worldliness this has often been the case, just as it would have been with any supposable creed, whether written or the reverse. But take that Confession of Faith as held and endorsed in the vast majority of Presbyterian Churches the world over to-day, and will any one say, who is competent to pass an intelligent judgment on the matter, that it is less a nineteenth century document, examined, discussed and adopted again and again by individuals and Churches, than if it had all been thought out and expressed for the first time by men of the present generation? Wise, learned, fearless and holy men have, again and again,

for union and other purposes, gone over this document paragraph by paragraph, clause by clause, and have formally re-adopted and re-endorsed it. They have made it their own. Why? Because they were the slaves of tradition? or cowards that trembled at the nod of dead men? Some may say so, some have said so, but neither their charity, their modesty, nor their judgment would be or has been flattered by the declaration. Besides, if these men were slaves and dishonest as well when, but a few years ago, they solemnly declared that they *had* examined it carefully and adopted it honestly, not as the confession of their fathers' faith but of their own, what better could be expected of them if they set themselves to-day to revise, expurgate and improve that which, but a short time ago, they, in the most solemn manner, most earnestly adopted, and which, had they in the interval changed in the estimate they had avowed, they were bound as honestly and as earnestly to repudiate or modify as they had formerly, and it is to be presumed *ex animo*, adopted it as a whole. It is only some seven years since this was done by the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The document so adopted, after so much careful study and prayerful conference, is surely modern in the best sense of the term. If not, what in the circumstances is to be so designated? What could honestly be so declared? What could even be so imagined?

HOME MISSION NOTES.

BY REV. DR. COCHRANE.

ONE hundred pounds sterling have been received from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, for the Home Mission Fund.

THE Rev. Mr. Herald, late of Dundas, has arrived at Prince Arthur's Landing, to take charge of that congregation, and the station at Fort William, for the next six months.

THE Rev. Mr. Sieveright has reached Winnipeg, on his way to the Prince Albert mission. He preached on Sabbath morning, 31st ult., in Kildonan (Dr. Black's church), and in the evening in Knox Church. He left on Wednesday, by the new passenger express, direct for his field of labour.

SEVERAL Presbyteries, in addition to Barrie, Owen Sound and Lindsay, desire ordained missionaries for special fields. All such should correspond with the Convener, who is prepared to receive applications from ministers or licentiates who seek appointments to such work. A missionary is also sought by the Manitoba Presbytery for Palestine, and a minister for Emerson, Manitoba, which is now a regularly organized congregation.

THE Rev. R. Moodie having been appointed by the Committee to visit Parry Sound and report to the Convener, has done so. From his communications the following details are given: "Arrived on Thursday, Oct. 27th, returning on Tuesday, Nov. 2nd. Made full inquiries as to condition and prospects, and examined session records and treasurer's books, which were found correctly kept. The numerical strength of the two congregations—Parry Harbour and Carling station—are, in all, twenty-two families and forty-nine members. Contributions of Parry Sound station average \$2.90 weekly; that of Carling, \$40 per annum. The debt incurred under the former missionary, and also the board of the student sent by the Missionary Society during the summer months, has been paid, so that now they have no liabilities whatever, beyond \$150 on the church building. Although the trade in lumbering has revived, it has not increased the ability of the people to contribute for ordinances. The mill owners do not share the advance with their hands. The congregation has suffered during the past two or three years by removals and other hindrances. The prospects, on the whole, are now encouraging. Those who remain are devoted to the Church and willing to support ordinances to the extent of their ability. The Sabbath school is regularly maintained, with forty scholars and a good staff of teachers. In order to the growth of our cause there, services would need to be held at Parry Sound morning and evening, and at Carling in the afternoon, which is ten miles distant, and reached generally by water. Other stations, reached by land, are at too great a distance from Parry Sound to be reached by a minister, and too weak to be counted on for aid. The people are hopeful of raising \$250 for an ordained missionary, if the Home Mission Committee sees its way clear to make up the deficit needful for his support."