

though I am free from the toils, anxieties, and responsibilities of the life and work of one who has the oversight of a church, still, I trust, I may without egotism assure you that I yield to none in the strength of my desire for the growth and prosperity of the body at large, and that I hold myself under obligation to do what I can to promote and secure this growth and prosperity.

I may further say, that my conviction of the soundness of our principles and of the correctness of our church-polity is one that gathers strength as my experience and observation become, from year to year, enlarged. But all will admit, that principles may be never so sound, and an ecclesiastical polity may be never so correct, and yet through faulty agents, or defective means, may fail, either wholly or in part, to secure the end for which they exist. Indeed, this has always and everywhere been the case, where imperfect human agents and defective human methods are employed in the application and working out of principles however good and noble in their character they may be.

I say these things not as if enunciating any new truth I have discovered, but rather to prepare the way for the utterance of a few thoughts on our general position and condition as a denomination, that have long burdened my mind, but from the utterance of which I have shrunk, partly because of my peculiar position among you, and partly because a fitting opportunity has not presented itself. For as in a nice game of skill between two players, the looker-on often sees good moves missed and bad moves made, which escape the notice of the combatants, so one placed as I am with respect to the general operations and life of the body, may observe things which escape the notice, or at least less powerfully attract the attention, of those who are engaged in the thick of the work. And should I in the course of this address feel called upon to say things of a less pleasant and encouraging character than are wont to be said on occasions such as this, I beg you not to impute to me a motive of fault-finding, nor a desire for depreciation, but rather to give me credit for a sincere wish, by pointing out what, according to my judgment, may be weak points in our methods of procedure, to promote the general good of all.

For many years past, since I have paid a closer attention to our annual statistics, I have been impressed by the thought, that our Congregational churches are not advancing in strength and numbers in anything like the proportion their growth should bear to the increased population of the country and to the progress made by other churches. It is not my purpose to present an array of figures and calculations that would simply perplex us; still I must refer to a few of our own statistics, in order to illustrate and confirm my point.

The statistics presented at the second annual meeting of the "Congregational Union of Canada," give 2,877 as the total of members, and 11,980 of hearers, at all churches and stations. At the seventh annual meeting, held in 1861, 3,560 members and 10,905 adherents were reported; and ten years later, at the seventeenth annual meeting, held in 1871, the total of the membership reported were