

Trans-Atlantic Retrospect.

The Autumnal Meeting of the CONGREGATIONAL UNION of England and Wales, held in Liverpool on the 13th of October, and three following days, was marked in a high degree by a spirit of unity, earnestness, and devotion to principles. The subjects which principally engaged the attention of the meeting were Lay Agency, British Missions, and Trust Deeds. The former is evidently the question of the day, both in England and this country—how best to employ the laymen of the churches who have the ability and the will to do good; how best to supplement the labours of pastors, by carrying the word of God into neighbourhoods where it is inadvisable to form churches and to place a minister. The remarks of Mr. Morley on this subject were worthy of serious notice.

“He had been struck with the rapid extension of the Primitive Methodist Society—a body which was doing a vast amount of good throughout the country, and there was one fact with respect to it which showed the importance to it of lay agency. Although the body numbered 6,000 preaching stations, there were only 800 ministers. Now he had observed that in a very large number of Independent churches the ministers were in circumstances of deep depression. Pastors were anxious to remove, and the people were often as anxious to get them away. There was no cohesion between the members and minister. What was needed was that they should be brought more frequently into loving co-operation with one another. A minister in the North of England had told him that out of 350 members belonging to his church, there were not more than fifty doing active work for the Lord. Surely that was a wrong state of things, and doubtless if it could be remedied the progress of the church would be much more rapid.”

There is no reason that lay agency should not be employed among us in a far larger degree than it has hitherto been; our system is expansive enough to embrace it in its widest operations. Among all denominations, and not less in the Episcopalian than others, there is a growing conviction that it is the duty of all Christians of both sexes to join in the work of the Lord, and that it is one great duty of pastors to see that the members of their churches are thus employed; an idle church is an anomaly, it is worse, it is a sin, it is treason against the Lord and Master, and we rejoice in the proofs that the churches are alive to their duty in this matter; it is a greater earnest of the spread of the gospel than millions of dollars contributed year by year to send out missionaries, or to scatter the Bible over the land. When every member of every church, or even the bulk of them, are heartily at work for the Lord, then, and not until then may we expect such an outpouring of success as shall indicate the dawn of the latter day glory.

The meeting on Congregational principles was a noble one; we do not remember to have read any speeches on the subject which more completely commanded our approval; although the speakers were all hearty in their adherence to Congregationalism, yet it was in submission to the word of God and to Christ—no exalting the system at the expense of the truth, no blind unreasoning adhesion to it because it was Congregationalism, as Dr. Vaughan well said:—

“You have heard a great deal this evening about our principles, and a stranger might suppose that we were in danger of attaching undue importance to them. Now I do not mean to say that there is no danger of that kind, but I do mean to say that there is not another denomination in Christendom so free from that weakness. You will hear a great deal more in our pulpits against trusting in