

British American Presbyterian, 102 BAY STREET, TORONTO.

FOR TERMS, ETC., SEE EIGHTH PAGE.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

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British American Presbyterian,
FRIDAY, JUNE 23, 1878.

THE GREAT DEBATE.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, held this year will be memorable for the debate which occurred connected with the reference of the Presbytery of Toronto to the matter affecting the Rev. D. J. Macdonnell. The business of the Supreme Court had, to a large extent, to give way to the consideration of the proceedings of the Presbytery connected with the minister of St. Andrew's. It was felt on all hands that a discussion involving vast interests was forced upon the Church. Not only were the members of Assembly under the conviction that a crisis had come demanding serious attention; but the people throughout the country were looking earnestly for the solution of a difficult problem. The interest was not confined to the Presbyterian denomination. The mind of the Church in all its branches was deeply excited. No better evidence of this can be furnished than that presented by the immense audiences which filled to overflowing a building of such dimensions as the Knox Church. Even during the day the seats were fully occupied. The evening sessions were literally crowded to suffocation. The interest of the public grew from day to day in intensity. It was a magnificent spectacle to witness a number of highly educated men exhibiting such moral earnestness of purpose in regard to what was felt to be a great and vital point. We referred in a late number to the value of debate in Church Courts, little thinking then we were on the eve of one of the most memorable discussions which has ever taken place in Synod or Assembly. And it is with considerable satisfaction we now direct attention to the great debate in several of its leading aspects.

For one thing, an unmistakeable affirmation has been given to a fundamental doctrine. In common with many others, we were grieved at the thought of any question being raised as to the eternity of the future punishment of the wicked. This we believed to be a vital doctrine of the system of truth adopted as the basis of union, which was accepted by the Assembly last year in Montreal. Mr. Macdonnell, by his sermon, whether unwittingly or not, has raised doubts in many minds connected with the doctrine in question. As he himself allowed, he has been seized by all sorts of persons holding queer views as an ally and as a champion. He has been the occasion of creating alarming unrest in the public mind on a point which was considered finally and completely settled by the almost unanimous voice of Christendom. All this would have been endorsed and perpetuated by a certain action of the Assembly, if it could have been possible for them to have done otherwise than they did, when to a man they so nobly stood up in support of the truth that was at stake. In consequence of this, the Church stands on solid ground to-day. Its ministers and elders are seen uniting one and all in the declaration of the eternity of future rewards and punishments. With absolute certainty we may conclude, from the faithful testimony which has been given to the doctrine of the Confession of Faith, that henceforth our preachers will utter no uncertain voice regarding the punishment of the wicked; but that with more earnestness of conviction than was ever shown in the past, the doctrine in question will be asserted and maintained.

It is impossible for any one—he be friend or foe—not to be struck with the remarkable ability displayed in the discussion. The real point at issue—as we have in fact just said—did not and could not refer to the truth of the doctrine involved. The gist of the matter lay in the actual position occupied by Mr. Macdonnell, and there of course grew out of this the action which it was necessary to take in reference to him. From being a question of future punishment, it grew to be one connected with the subscription of ministers to the Confession. The one side held that Mr. Macdonnell was in the position of giving a qualified subscription; the other that he had sufficiently condoned the original offence, and it was safe to trust to a man of his honesty for the future. Without commenting upon the difference between them, we cannot sufficiently admire the consummate ability with which the argument was conducted from beginning to end. First of all, there was the singularly

lucid and powerful statement of the reference by Principal Caven, and though he was obliged by the apparently injudicious speech which Mr. Macdonnell delivered on the first night of the debate, to resile next day from the position he had taken, his address remains as an admirable expression, not only of the Principal's clearness and force of intellect, but of the loving tenderness of his heart. Rev. Mr. King, who, for the same reason, was constrained afterwards to withdraw from the support of Mr. Macdonnell, delivered an address that did credit both to his head and heart. Professor McLaren showed himself to advantage as a powerful and conscientious defender of the faith. Dr. Proudfoot was at once generous and conservative as to the truth in the motion he made adopting the view of the reference of the Presbytery, though he also was afterwards obliged to withdraw in favour of the ultimate finding of the court. Principal MacVicar, from the moment he commenced speaking to the close of his able address, advocating the unsatisfactoriness of Mr. Macdonnell's statement, was listened to with profound attention. Many other speakers on the same side, who occupy less prominent positions in the church, delivered able and thoughtful speeches, which made lasting impressions upon the House. On the other side, there was a very considerable display of forensic ability. Many amendments were made that looked in the direction of dismissing the matter of the reference, either immediately or at no distant date. Professor McKerras revealed much legal acumen in the questions he put to Professor McLaren, and also in the temperate address he delivered at a later stage. Principal Snodgrass took a calm view of the matter, and put it in a forcible and judicial manner before the Assembly. The great speech on this side was that of Professor McKnight, who delivered an address of wonderful analytic power that dissected the mind of Mr. Macdonnell in such a way as to call forth the admiration of all who listened to it. It was all the more remarkable that Mr. Macdonnell, with his known fondness for nicety of expression, could see his way to accept this speech as a fair analysis of his mental condition. The motion of Dr. Ure was that around which rallied all the strength of those who were favourable to a lenient view. Dr. Ure carried conviction with him when he stated that he himself had once been assailed with similar doubts and difficulties, and having been kindly dealt with, he now stood on solid ground. We cannot even refer to the many speeches delivered by other gentlemen on this side, which were of more than average ability. It is sufficient to speak of the gladiatorial spectacle presented by Rev. G. M. Grant, of Halifax, and Rev. J. G. Robb of Toronto. They were well matched in every way. Mr. Grant made an able speech, full of common sense, temperate in tone, with a considerable admixture of humor and eloquence. The reply of Mr. Robb was a fine specimen of controversial talent. He followed Mr. Grant minutely into every statement, and succeeded in making a most telling impression upon his audience. In many points of view the finest speech of all was that delivered by Mr. Macdonnell at the close of the debate. He was evidently drawn out of himself by the sympathetic audience. He held the entire assemblage spell-bound during upwards of an hour. He succeeded in removing many unpleasant impressions produced by previous speeches both in the Presbytery and the Assembly. It was a speech of undoubted ability, which did more to pave the way for an amicable settlement than any address which was spoken in his favour.

The victory lay with Principal MacVicar and his supporters. That it was gained by 263 to 101 votes, shows how keenly the Assembly felt the importance of the occasion, and the duty of maintaining the Confession at all hazards. By this vote the whole matter was placed in the hands of an influential Committee to confer with Mr. Macdonnell, and to report to this Assembly. We cannot conclude without saying that it is impossible sufficiently to express our admiration at the courtesy and good temper which characterized the whole debate. Not one word was uttered in this direction that need be recalled. Every one felt that the members of Assembly, while differing in their views, were animated by one desire—to do justice to one another, to act kindly by Mr. Macdonnell, and at the same time to maintain uncompromisingly the truths of Scripture and the Confession of Faith.

THE new Presbyterian Church, in course of erection, at Wellington, township of North Gower, is being rapidly pushed on to completion. The building will be of brick, modern style, good finish, and large enough to seat comfortably about 600 persons. A beautiful site near the Church of England has been selected, and when completed—by October—the new church will be a credit to the Presbyterians of North Gower, of whom the Rev. A. C. Stewart is the esteemed pastor. Cost, about \$1,600.

THE MACDONNELL CASE.

The General Assembly, by its vote on Tuesday night, adopted its committee's report on the reference from the Presbytery of Toronto, which declared the statements of Rev. D. J. Macdonnell to be unsatisfactory, and required him to report to the next General Assembly whether he accept the teaching of the Church on the subject. This decision relieves all parties from a disagreeable difficulty. The Presbytery of Toronto, whose proceedings in this matter have been so satisfactorily vindicated by the Supreme Court, will find itself more free than ever to go forward with the great work which they have at heart in building up the cause and kingdom of Christ within its bounds. The Congregations throughout the country, which have been so deeply excited by the discussion raised in connection with this case, will be satisfied and delighted that the General Assembly has authoritatively re-affirmed the Standards of the Church, and especially the doctrine of the eternity of the future punishment of the wicked involved in the proceedings of the various Courts. The Secular Press may desiderate for many reasons the absence of a discussion so exciting in its nature; but the community, we are certain, will feel relieved by the cause *celebre* being withdrawn from their view. We are sure we state the mind of all parties, when we express our delight that this protracted discussion has been brought to a satisfactory termination.

With such a decision, the doctrine of the Church has been amply vindicated. No one can henceforth call in question the mind of the Church, not only as to the particular doctrine involved, but as to the Confession of Faith itself. It is in this way that Providence makes even apparent evils subserve good ends, by thus emphasizing some great and vital truth. In the midst of the activities of the age in which we live, men are apt to lose sight of eternal verities. They become absorbed in the things of time. The earnest convictions with which they commenced their life-work as to the relation of present duties to the eternity which lies beyond, become dulled through the cares and anxieties of business and of domestic life. The proceedings in reference to Mr. Macdonnell will, indeed, be most valuable, if, in any way they become means to this end,—of forcing upon the public attention, the awful considerations connected with the future, and with neglect of the salvation which is so richly provided by Jesus Christ. But we value the judgment of the General Assembly for this special reason, that it illustrates the authority that is vested in Church Courts, and the responsibility laid upon them of asserting and defending the truth, as well as dealing with matters connected with the work and government of the Church. Previous to the disruption in Scotland, it not unfrequently occurred that even Parliament awaited the action of the General Assembly before proceeding to some special legislation. In this country we have at this moment a spectacle far grander than that. The people of the Dominion have looked earnestly and eagerly to this General Assembly for the settlement of an exciting question; and we venture to say that with the decision of Tuesday evening they will be amply satisfied. The action of the Assembly is a vindication before the world of the Presbyterian Polity and Government. In no other Church that we know of, could such a finding have been so quickly and thoroughly reached.

The decision of the General Assembly, in reference to Mr. Macdonnell, has an important bearing upon the future of the Church. The House was unanimous in asserting and maintaining the standards of the Church. This Assembly thus hands down the well tried and time honoured Confession to future generations, unimpaired as to the doctrines which it contains. It endorses over again the Confession of Faith, as founded upon, and agreeable to the word of God, as that formulated system of truth from which the Church derives her distinctive character, and as the sum and substance of what her ministers are expected to teach. If the doctrines of the Church have been faithfully taught in the past, we have a guarantee that they will be taught in the future with all fidelity and zeal. Presbyteries will be found still more careful than they have ever been in testing their candidates for license, by the well-known standards. Ministers will make the Confession more and more a text book in their advanced Bible and Communion classes; and, we cannot but entertain the hope, as the Confession and the Catechisms have been, by these recent proceedings, brought more prominently before the community, and emphatically endorsed by one of the most influential ecclesiastical Assemblies in the world, that families and individuals will more and more appreciate these Standards, and use them as helps and companions in the study of Scripture.

Taking all the circumstances of the case into account, we do not think that Mr. Macdonnell, or any of the minority who supported him, have reason to complain of the injunction laid upon him to report his views regarding the doctrine in question, to

the next General Assembly. Mr. Macdonnell's own admissions as to the practical un-wisdom of preaching the sermon from which these proceedings sprang, constitute sufficient ground for the action of the Assembly. It is a mild decision in itself, and we presume it is intended as an easy method of settling the matter, that will at once conserve the authority of the Church and the interests of the esteemed brother whom they condemn. Though a large and influential minority did the utmost in their power, even to the point of dissenting un-animously from the finding of the Assembly, we think we speak their mind when we regard the decision of the case not in the light of defeat, but rather as securing what concerned them very deeply, viz.: the status and continued ministry of Mr. Macdonnell. The difference between the minority and the majority that appeared in the vote, was felt to be one not touching an essential principle, but one of expediency. The real object which the dissentients had at heart is gained by the Assembly's decision. It gives us pleasure to think of this, especially in view of the future of the recently United Church. Hardly a word as to secession has been broached during the whole discussion, and when such was even breathed, it was promptly rebuked. It is most promising to the Church, that no bitter feelings have been engendered by these proceedings, that no party spirit has been evoked; but that the Church stands one and united to-day as she did, when in Montreal the four sections of which she is composed, declared themselves to be one Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That the Presbyterian Church in Canada may abide in the bonds of peace and love, and be led by the guidance of God to do a great and lasting work for this Dominion, and for all the kingdoms of the world, is our earnest and most fervent prayer.

PRESBYTERIANISM IN THE UNITED STATES.

At the opening of the General Assembly of the American Presbyterian Church lately held at Brooklyn, N. Y., the retiring Moderator, the Rev. Ed. D. Morris, D.D., took for his subject, and delivered a very long and instructive discourse upon "The Past and the Future of American Presbyterianism." As Presbyterianism is all the world over, we cannot but feel deeply interested in its progress everywhere, but especially in a country so near to us, with which we have such close relations, and where our form of church polity and our doctrines have made such rapid progress, and attained to so commanding a position. It will, therefore, we trust be gratifying to our readers to have some of the more important statements of this discourse laid before them.

It is stated then that American Presbyterianism "sprang from the British rather than the Continental stock," and in that respect is a twin sister to our own church, both holding and glorying in the same Confession and Catechism. The beginning of the eighteenth century, when many British Presbyterians were driven abroad by pre-latic persecutions, was marked by the rapid growth of that system of doctrine and worship, the first Presbytery was organized, and the church took a place of its own among the others which had then obtained a footing upon the shores of the New World.

Four general conditions are mentioned as modifying to a greater or less degree the character of American Presbyterianism, and which impressed upon it peculiarities of its own while yet retaining its general family characteristics. These were first, and probably the most important of all: "Its gradual and entire separation from the parent stock. Second: Its entire dependence upon the voluntary principle." The success of this experiment on so great a scale has undoubtedly powerfully influenced public opinion upon this subject, not only in America, but in Europe as well. Third: "The peculiar collocation and mingling of the various American sects in a common struggle of life and growth." In this respect the New World presented a striking contrast to the old, and those bodies which most promptly recognized this fact, and made the most energetic efforts to extend themselves everywhere, spurning all geographical lines, most speedily arose to a commanding position. In this struggle Presbyterians were not behind. The fourth general principle spoken of is, "The universal liberty of thought and of speech recognized as a fundamental principle in American Society." Each of these is elaborated at considerable length in this discourse.

Corresponding to these four general conditions and causes of rapid development four corresponding specific conditions are mentioned, only the first two of which, however, are dwelt upon, viz.: first, "Our special type of theology considered both intrinsically and in comparison with other theological beliefs; second, Our type of polity; third, Our type of worship and of Christian activity; and fourthly, Our denominational relation to the spirit of the age, and to certain marked tendencies in American life."

From these the speaker passes to the 'Actual Growth' of the American Church as the result of these general and special conditions, and Presbyterianism certainly has no reason to be ashamed of the exhibit presented in this sermon. Briefly it is this.

In 1706 the first Presbytery was formed, consisting of seven ministers and a "handful of churches, weak, scattered and undeveloped." In 1788 the first Continental Assembly was held. In 1837 the Church was sent into what was lately popularly known as the Old and New School Bodies; in 1870 they were reunited. Now the church numbers 86 synods, 178 presbyteries, 4,706 ministers, 4,999 churches, 500,084 communicants, and 520,462 Sabbath-school children, and hardly less than two millions of worshippers. In 1874-75 the contributions towards church purposes amounted to \$6,900,000, and for the general cause of evangelization \$2,725,000. "In the light of these statements the career of American Presbyterianism as exhibited in its various branches must be regarded as one of the miracles of modern Christianity. A century ago it was represented by 133 ministers only; its churches feeble and scattered were scarcely more numerous; and its membership cannot have exceeded six or eight thousand. The number, both of ministers and churches, have, during the century, increased more than thirty-fold; even during the past fifty years our ministry have multiplied six-fold, our churches four-fold, our membership eight-fold." Justly does the preacher say, "Such advance is hardly less than miraculous; and as we walk to-day with reverent tread about our beautiful Zion telling her towers and bulwarks, and considering the palaces of her glory, we must be blind indeed if we do not recognize in all this the sure evidence of a divine presence, and exclaim with the prophet of Israel: 'In His love and in His pity He redeemed us: He bore us, and carried us all the days of old.'"

Add to this now the Presbyterianism of the South, that of other bodies if not in name, yet in fact Presbyterian; add to all these that of our own land, and it gives us a wonderful idea of the power of the Presbyterian Church in America, its adaptability for rapid growth, and the bright future which lies before that system of doctrine, government, and worship, 'b' which we hold and in which we glory.

THE REV. JAMES FLECK, B.A.

Before leaving the ancient city of Armagh, Ireland, the Rev. James Fleck, the newly installed minister of Knox Church, Montreal, was the recipient of costly gifts and flattering addresses, the latter expressing deep regret at his departure. The *Ulster Gazette* of May 6th gives an extensive report of the interesting proceedings, from which we make the following extracts:—

"A Soiree was held in the Second Armagh Presbyterian Church, by the members of the congregation, for the purpose of bidding farewell to their late pastor, the Rev. James Fleck, B.A., (who for seven years faithfully and zealously acted as their minister,) and presenting him with an address, on the occasion of his leaving this city for Montreal. The address was accompanied by a handsome gold lever watch and pencil case. Robert McCrum, Esq., ably discharged the duties of chairman. On the platform were many of the leading gentlemen of the city, and scattered through the happy and joyous assemblage of ladies and gentlemen were many leading clergymen."

The Chairman in his remarks alluded to Mr. Fleck in the following terms: "I feel it would be bad taste in Mr. Fleck's presence to say before him what I know and feel he deserves to be said of him. But this much I can say, I have ever found him and valued him as a cordial friend, a Christian gentleman, and an earnest minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Again and again he has been called outside the limits of this congregation, and most earnestly, and most cordially, and most heartily he has always responded to the call, and in his hands the Gospel trumpet has been sounded by no uncertain sound. I remember well his predecessor here; and when in the providence of God Mr. Henderson was taken away, I felt how hard it would be to fill up the blank made by his removal. And I thought again of the difficulty of getting a man to supply his place. I do not intend to compare the virtues of the two men, for the fruits of Mr. Henderson will live in this city for ever. When, therefore, Mr. Fleck came, I said to myself 'you have chosen the right man.' He came then, and you all have seen how he gained the affection and esteem, not only of the Presbyterians of this congregation, but of all the Christian public in Armagh. I believe he came here with proper and extended views of the church of Christ. I felt he had deepened in him that junction of catholicity that looks on every man as a true worker. The step he is about to take is a momentous one—momentous, indeed, to everyone—but especially momentous to one who is a minister of the Gospel of Christ. To leave the land of his birth, the friends of his early youth, must be very momentous indeed. But to leave this congregation, who love and respect and revere him, and to whom he is greatly attached, must be a trying occasion indeed. One thing I can promise him—he goes from us with the good wishes of not only his people, but the good wishes of the whole of Armagh." The meeting was subsequently addressed by eminent ministers and laymen, all speaking in the same kind and friendly terms of their departing friend. The Rev. Jackson Smyth, brother of Dr.