

THE
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All communications for the Editorial, News of Churches, and Correspondence Columns should be addressed to the Managing Editor, Box 1648, P.O. Toronto.

Pastors and church officers are particularly requested to forward items for "News of the Churches" column.

"SHALL WE HAVE A REVIVAL?"

TURNING over the pages of a former volume of the CANADIAN INDEPENDENT, the other day, we came across an article with the above heading. Quickly the answer came back to our lips—"O Lord, thy work revive!" The true revival ever comes down from above, instead of being "got up" by a sort of high pressure, in the form of a protracted meeting, on which churches too often rely. From such purely human—we had almost said mechanical—efforts, only human results can flow. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

On the other hand, there is a time and a place in the economy of God's kingdom for special and protracted effort to revive the Church, and to bring within its pale such as are already converted, though not yet professors of faith in Jesus—of whom, we are persuaded, there are far more among the hearers of the Gospel than is generally supposed—and lead to Christ those who are yet unsaved. The solemn pass-over services, in the reigns of Asa and Josiah, and other of the kings of Judah, when the people "entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul," were of this character. In some instances these sacred feasts were protracted several weeks beyond the time prescribed by the law (2 Chron. xxx.), so great was the joy of the people at their re-consecration of themselves to the service of the Lord; and that the Lord accepted of them we know, for "their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, even unto heaven." And yet, humanly speaking, there never was a more discouraging time in which to attempt any special effort for the revival of God's work. The darkest hour, as it generally is, was just before the dawn!

But should not such special efforts be undertaken and conducted by pastors of churches themselves, rather than by calling in foreign aid? Who can be so well acquainted with the spiritual condition of their several charges as they? Undoubtedly, a revival springing up *within* a church, under the faithful and regular ministrations of the Word and ordinances, is, other things being equal, the most likely to be genuine and lasting in its results. There will be less of the wild-fire that is kindled by novelty and eccentricity—less of the hand of man, and more of the power of truth and of the Spirit of God. The best preaching is that which exalts Christ and His work, and sinks the man out of sight, and that is, perhaps, hardly the characteristic of the kind of revival effort that is imported, and pre-advertised, and paid for! Big "I" is often far too prominent in such cases, though doubtless, to a large extent, it is the natural result of the prominence into which a man is thrust by his success and by the courtesy of friends.

Of course, everything human is imperfect, and in regard to this as in regard to everything else, our rule must be to seek the greatest good to the greatest number, for in so doing we shall best promote the glory of the Divine Redeemer. The Lord works oftentimes by the humblest and most unlikely instruments, while those on which we most rely for success are sometimes rejected. He will not give His glory to another. We do know that the faithful, loving, tearful sowing of the good seed shall not be in vain. Help from without may be very properly sought where we are sure the preaching will be that of "Christ crucified," and that the methods will comport with the message. We often hear it said, that if only one soul is saved by such special efforts it will more than repay all the labour and cost. But if by improper measures many souls are put farther away from the kingdom than before, and go back from the anxious seat never

more to be reached by either ordinary or extraordinary means, the seeming gain is but a real and terrible loss. Let us therefore be wise as well as zealous in our work. Only as "workers together with God" can we be sure of His blessing, and of true success.

ACCORDING TO USAGE OR NOT.

OUR brethren in Michigan have been holding a little controversy of their own lately. The trouble has been about the validity of a certain ordination service. One party maintains that it is invalid, because it was not performed by a regular Council of pastors and churches, while they claim to be the denominational usage. The Rev. A. Hastings Ro's of Port Huron is the champion of this view. Another party—led by Rev. J. Morgan Smith of Grand Rapids—holds that the service was strictly valid, and in keeping with Congregational custom. So for some weeks past these gentlemen have been arraigning each other's views, contradicting one another, and reading out of old musty documents to each other those scraps which seem to support their divergent opinions. Both sides have been appealing to "usage," and the difficulty is that they each interpret usage differently, and they seem as far as ever from coming to any agreement.

Out of this controversy this question starts up, How far is it wise to appeal to denominational custom? How far must our churches be bound by usage? It has long been our boast that in our communion there is play room for individuality of doctrine and of plan. Our claim of superiority over other systems has been shored up by the fact, that while the decisions and work of others have to be subject to a long line of usages, we have perfect freedom to decide every case upon its own individual merit. If the matter in hand coincides with denominational custom, very well. But if not, it can stand on the footing of its individual rectitude and merit. When then we consider any question from the standpoint of usage first, are we not transgressing the fundamental principles of our communion? Do we not forsake the genius of our whole denominational history when we make so much of custom? Has not our history been one continued protest against customs which laid claim to value because they were customary? Then how is it consistent that we should fall back on usage, when we have protested against such a course by others?

In considering any subject anywhere should not the questions, "Is it right?" "Is it prudent?" have the pre-eminence over the question, "Is it customary?" Usage can never be so good a criterion as rightness and prudence. Yet a great many are continually appealing to it as if it was the best arbitrator they could have. How often in church meetings and other gatherings plans are proposed which are decidedly meritorious, being feasible and wise; but they develop a strong opposition from those who allege that they are not customary. This argument of "usage" has kept back more reforms in State and in Church than any other. Matters have been considered through the plans of the fathers, rather than through what may be most prudent for their sons to adopt or do. And this taskmaster has held the lash over many persons, and whipped them into obedience to the past merely because it is past. In saying this, we are not maligning the past. We are grateful for every healthful influence which comes from out the past. But we protest against making an appeal to the past, to custom, the primary appeal. Rightness and prudence form the first principle of our judgment of any belief, of any work; and then an appeal to usage may be in place. And if it be confirmatory of what we have first discovered to be right or prudent, then we welcome it as an entrenchment to the position we have taken. But we contend that "usage" must not be made either primary or prominent.

ZION CHURCH, MONTREAL.

WE saw with deep regret an announcement in the Montreal correspondence of the Toronto papers that the congregation of Zion Church, Montreal, had

decided to sell the building as they found the debt too burdensome. We are sure that the knowledge of this will cause a pang of sorrow throughout our denomination in Canada. Zion Church, associated as it always will be with the honoured name of Dr. Wilkes, has held for more than a generation the position of the leading church of the Dominion, and its extinction would be like the blotting out a bright particular star from the firmament of heaven. We hope, however, that such will not be the result, but that in another part of the city, under the old name we trust, Zion Church will be revived to be a pillar of strength to our body. If anything can mitigate the pain of the present burden and anxiety under which the church labours, it is that it has been mainly brought about by a large-handed liberality in church extension work. The facts appear to be as follows: Some years ago Zion Church expended \$7,000 on the purchase of land and the erection of the Eastern Congregational Church, which money was borrowed. Again, it gave \$5,000 towards the erection of Calvary Church, also borrowed, making a mortgage debt of \$12,000. Then came the formation of Emmanuel Church, for which purpose one hundred and twenty members left Zion, greatly weakening it, of course. In addition to the above named mortgage there was a floating debt of \$3,000 at that time, which was assumed by the old church. Further, with a most laudable anxiety to do the best possible for its pastor, Mr. Bray, the church fixed his stipend at a sum which proved to be beyond its financial strength, thus entailing an increasing deficit during the first two years of his ministry, so that the debt is now in the neighbourhood of \$18,000. A reduced annual expenditure was commenced in October last, but even with the reduction it appeared likely that there must be another deficit of from one to two thousand dollars.

This being the case, and there having been a plan years ago to sell the church building, and to move up northward and westward, it has been deemed well to sell the property, pay off the indebtedness and treasure up the balance as the commencement of a fund with which to erect another building, not so large or expensive.

We believe that the present idea is to take the Queen's Hall and to have service there twice on the Sunday, and to hold the Sunday school in an adjoining room.

If it be thought that the publication of these facts is making private matters too public, our reply is that the position of Zion Church, Montreal, in the body demands that there should be no misconception of the causes that have led to this result, and we are mistaken if the knowledge does not produce a kindlier feeling and deeper sympathy with the church in its time of difficulty than uncertainty or ignorance could have done.

HINDRANCES TO CHRISTIAN UNITY.

CONCLUDING PAPER.

ACCEPTING Dr. Wilkes' statements, given in our last, as substantially correct in their utterances regarding Congregationalism as a denomination, we now inquire what hindrances do they present to enlarged Christian union, or to forming the basis of a catholic Church; for though a Church may be conceived as embracing *all* professed followers of Jesus, *in fact*, no such church exists. Yet is it possible that a Church's principles may be such that all who profess and call themselves Christians, and whose lives do not give the lie to such profession, may be included within its pale? This would be true catholicity. Can the Congregational Church be truly catholic?

Two principles are posited, and we maintain rightly, in the extract made from Dr. Wilkes' paper,—the first—independence of all extraneous ecclesiastical control—is rather a negative position which may be stated as a "disallowing the utility of creeds and articles of religion as a bond of union, and a protesting against subscription to any human formularies as a term of communion;" in which case the sanction of the earliest churches is given to the Congregational principle as Mosheim and Neander very plainly declare; and