

THE AMERICAN CONGRESS OF CHURCHES ON CHRISTIAN UNITY.

Readers of the *Century* magazine will readily recall some most interesting papers by that forcible and large hearted writer, the Rev. Washington Gladden, entitled, "The Christian League of Connecticut." Most readers, however, while enjoying the papers, thought it would be almost a utopian hope to realize the beautiful picture of "brethren dwelling together in unity," of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists meeting to discuss and co-operate, placing first the interests of the Church universal. One would think that, at this stage of the world's history, when vital Christianity has to face so many eager and deadly foes, the mottoes *E pluribus unum* and "Union is Strength," would be her watchwords as a matter of course. Yet so high still do denominational and minor doctrinal differences run, that one of our most liberal thinkers—judging by past experience—remarked smilingly of the "Christian League of Connecticut" "that it was only on paper yet." But let us be thankful that it is more than on paper now. The "American Congress of Churches" which met in the beautiful city of Hartford last May, seems to have been a very fair realization of what "was not all a dream." In it, representative men from all the bodies that "profess and call themselves Christians"—Episcopalian and Methodist, Congregationalist and Baptist, Presbyterian and Universalist, Quaker and Unitarian—met to testify to the one great uniting bond and centre—the personal Saviour—and the love to Him, through which all have assumed the Christian name. When in the proceedings we find such well-known names as those of Dr. Crosby, Dr. Hopkins, Dr. Pentecost, Bishop Cox, Dr. Gladden, Dr. Boardman and Dr. Ormiston, alternating with those of Dr. Freeman Clarke, President Porter and President Robinson, we feel that the Congress was as catholic and comprehensive as it was possible to be. Yet, while each speaker evidently held strongly his own convictions, and several naively expressed their sense of the superiority of their own branch of the Church and their belief that it would yet be the uniting force, there was not the slightest tinge of controversy—far less of *odium theologicum*—toward the proceedings. All felt that it was not intellectual unity, but the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," which they had met to illustrate and emphasize, as indeed they seemed divinely guided to do. One wise provision of the rules agreed upon—printed in capital letters—will remind many of the same judicious provision of the "Christian League in Connecticut," and doubtless originated with its author. "No topic discussed in the Congress, nor any question of doctrine or opinion arising out of any discussion, shall ever be submitted to vote at any meeting of the Congress or of its Council." As this Congress simply aimed at exchanging sympathy and Christian sentiments on points interesting to all, the wisdom of excluding all that would tend to "divide the house" and jar our brotherly feeling is apparent at once.

Although the words spoken at the Congress met necessarily a limited audience, even with the aid of newspaper reproduction, the Council has laid an obligation on all thoughtful and catholic hearted Christians by publishing its proceedings in a neat pamphlet which can be had for fifty cents. As this, however, may not come in the way of many of the readers of THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN, the present writer feels that it will be conferring a benefit on those who may not read the papers for themselves, to transcribe some of the more forcible and suggestive passages which have a practical bearing for us all.

The opening paper by Dr. Crosby had for its subject the "Relations of a Divided Christendom to Aggressive Christianity," and vividly pointed out the comparative weakness of a divided Church, and the manner in which it would be possible to bring about a happier condition. The following are among its leading thoughts.

"A Church, split up into separate and often hostile camps, presses upon the world the Gospel of unity and brotherly love. It is true that Christ is preached, and we are glad. It is true that the Gospel in its power surmounts these disadvantages and paradoxes and spreads over the earth. But is this spread of the Gospel the result of these divisions? Some dare to say so, right in the face of the Gospel's teaching. Is not the spread of the Gospel in spite of these unseemly divisions? Do not explain away the mutual hostilities

of these divisions into generous rivalries. The pulpit polemics, the missionary friction, the recorded anathemas, are witnesses by the thousand of the hostility involved in the divisions of Christendom. Division implies a distinct apparatus of doctrinal basis for work. Such an apparatus must oppose that of another division, or else there would be no division. The moment you relax your hostility you are taking away the argument for division, you are weakening your doctrinal basis. But, say some, 'we carry on the hostility in a Christian way.' The outside world will not understand this delicate logic. In a passive Christianity we may hide the opposition; but in an aggressive Christianity the strife must appear and it is the un-Christian element in the Christian aggression. It is the hindrance to conviction in the pagan mind. It is an argument (whether sincerely held or not) for the resistance of the carnal mind in Christian lands. The Christian Church is divided. Paul and Apollos and Cephas are set up as heads instead of Christ, and the curse of the Corinthian Church rests upon Christendom to-day. There can be no millennium for a divided Church."

"The principles laid down for a better way are: First, the union of the Church must subordinate externals; secondly, the spiritual character of the Church must be emphasized; thirdly, the grading of doctrinal truth. By this we mean that there are truths without which a man cannot be a Christian, and there are other truths which a man may deny without compromising his Christian status, and that this difference must be practically recognized in a united Church. By hypothesis it is adherence to vital truth which makes the Christian and, as all Christians should be united before the world as a testimony, according to our Lord's wish, it follows as a necessary conclusion that no doctrinal truth which is not counted vital should be a cause of separation in aggressive Christianity."

"If we pass the denominations in review, we shall find each acknowledging the true Christianity of the other denominations. None believe the other out of Christ and salvation. The fact proves conclusively that they are all agreed on the category of vital Christian truths, and that none considers the peculiar truths which he holds as essential to a Christian life. We hold that, therefore, they are no reason for a separation in organization as against the unbelieving world. If now they put anything like organization or canon in the way of a collective and harmonious movement on the ranks of unbelief, they become heretical, factious and schismatic—to this extent denying Christ because dividing Him. These are solemn words and who shall dare to say they are not true?"

The closing words of his paper are equally worthy of being taken to heart—not least by Presbyterians, as they were spoken by one: "A uniformity of belief among Christians is not to be expected, perhaps not to be desired. Probably no Christian sees a given truth in an exhaustive light, and it requires many differing views to complete the experience in the aggregate. A creed that minutely defines the metaphysical side of a doctrine does not keep and preserve but cramps and crushes truth. We are now speaking of those truths which all Christians (as before shown) consider as non-essential, however important. Regarding these, there must be a yielding of dogmatism and unchangeableness and a readiness to clasp in loving embrace the brethren who differ if aggressive Christianity is to assume the form and dimensions commanded by our Lord."

Dr. Hopkins followed to the same purpose, though he could not refrain from allusions to what he holds to have been the episcopal mould of the early Church, which afterwards brought him under Dr. Pentecost's humorous though gentle criticism. But his closing words should be well weighed by any one who is consciously seeking to promote in any way the sectarian dividing spirit. "He, then, who longs and prays and labours the most earnestly for the unity of God's people—a unity that shall be real, organic, visible, such as the world cannot but see and confess—he is, at the same time, doing the most for the furtherance of the aggressive work of the Gospel and for the full granting of that constant petition, given us by our Lord in His own prayer, 'Thy kingdom come.'"

The Rev. F. D. Power struck the same note. "We must go back to the spirit, the unity, the faith, the practice, the name, the foundation of the early Church. Nothing is essential to the unity of Christians but the Apostles' teaching and testimony. The Bible alone

in faith, in its purity, its practice, without change will effect it. The old foundations are here; the old paths are here; Jesus of Nazareth is yesterday, to-day and forever, the Christ of God. The truth is the new and the old, the old and the new for evermore. And going back to Jerusalem and sweeping away the rubbish may we not lay hold upon the genuine foundations of the Christian institution—the imperishable basis of the Apostolic Church? And finding and building upon the old foundations and walking in the old paths, and restoring to man the Christian institution in its integrity and unity and divine power, may we not expect to convince the world of its truth, and bring the whole of a now divided Christendom as one people back from its waning to a true foundation? This is what the world wants. This is what Christianity wants."

These passages will suffice to show the tone and spirit of the Congress in regard to the great question of unity. Its mind on some other subjects we must reserve for another article. FIDELIS.

WATCHING AND WAITING.

MR. EDITOR,—In the "Allegory" of "The Servants," in a recent number of your paper, these sentences occur, which I find not in accordance with my experience, nor with my reading of the Gospel. "Watch means to be wakeful at the post of duty, never to be on the look-out for a person or an event. Wait is to bide God's good time, satisfied till it comes, without excitement or anxiety."

In Mark xiii. 35, 37, "Watch ye therefore," and "I say unto all, Watch"—our Lord is speaking to His disciples, in reference to His own return; so because the time is to them unknown and, therefore, uncertain, He urges this watchfulness. The same duty is inserted by the Holy Spirit in describing Christian duty in Titus ii. 13—"Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"—and the Beloved Disciple, in 1 John iii. 3, says: "Every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure"; thus showing its effect upon the life, when it enters into the motives of Christian conduct. Does any one think Mr. Moody a less efficient worker because he is looking for the speedy coming of the Lord? Do any think the Bonars or Dr. Somerville any less evangelical and earnest workers because they experience joyful help in this glorious hope amid all their arduous labours? And then, in regard to "waiting," is it not enjoined in such way as to show that it means resting on the promise of God, with a certain expectation, which the Spirit of God uses for active support to the Christian. The Thessalonians were commended not only because they turned from idols to the service of the living and true God, but also "to wait for His Son from heaven." This is, indeed, to bide God's good time, satisfied, not with idleness—not with present things, but with the expected coming of that Glorious Person who would come again, to receive them unto Himself. The reflexive power of this hope, divinely inserted among Gospel motives, is beginning again to be felt as in the early ages of the Church. Men are awaking to the orders given by the Son of Man before He took His journey into the far country. The rising up of so many evangelists in every form to tell the Gospel tidings—the eagerness of many in the Church to give themselves to the work in foreign lands—the increase of interest in the sad condition of the heathen—the large resources increasingly put into the treasury of the Lord—the universal feeling in the Church of intense desire for the latter-day baptism of the Holy Spirit—all these signs indicate the nearness of the dawn of the Day of the Lord. H. M. P.

THE Church of England has lost one of its most devoted representative men in the death of Dr. Fraser Bishop of Manchester. He was an earnest and sincere Christian, who spoke his convictions without fear and without temporizing. On all questions of public interest, after due consideration, he made up his mind and was at no pains to trim his utterances to suit the timid or half-hearted. His endeavor throughout his public career was to bring the Gospel home to the hearts of the people, and in all philanthropic movements he took an active part, being especially interested in the promotion of education. In this connection he rendered important service. He died from overwork in the sixty-seventh year of his age.