

Wm. C. Robertson

The Canadian Evangelist.

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"GO . . . SPEAK . . . TO THE PEOPLE ALL THE WORDS OF THIS LIFE."

Vol. V., No. 6.

TORONTO, JULY 15TH, 1890.

\$1 PER YEAR IN ADVANCE.

THE Canadian Evangelist

is devoted to the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ, and pleads for the union of all believers in the Lord Jesus in harmony with his own prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John, and on the basis set forth by the Apostle Paul in the following terms: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all."—Eph. iv. 1-6.

Trend of Religious Thought in the United States.

It is well nigh impossible for your Canadian readers to understand the present religious ferment among our people. Indeed the situation is difficult of comprehension even to one on the field. The onlooker can see various and complex phases of religious upheaval, movements that are often opposite in their tendency, but the resultant of these can only be a matter of conjecture. It is easier to point out the indications of coming changes than to specify the actual results already obtained.

It needs not to be stated that the uppermost thought in the religious horizon is the unity of God's people. It is in the air. It finds utterance in every religious convention. In some form or other it pervades the pulpit, platform and press. Those who have been pleading for unity these many years no longer feel oppressed by a sense of their peculiar and seemingly antagonistic position relative to other Christian bodies. They find themselves in unexpected company. Christian union is no longer an unpopular theme, nor are its advocates any longer regarded as unpractical cranks. The tide is steadily setting towards union. One of the most significant signs of this is the tone of the better class of literature. Through the press is constantly pouring a vast volume of Christian thought, which is giving evidence of a growing love of truth for truth's own sake. The growing tendency is towards the suppression of the denominational cult, and towards the emphasizing of universal beliefs.

There can be no question that much has been accomplished by the great democratic movements which during the past few years have brought Christians together for united conference. These have given us an opportunity to know one another better. We have been able to see the littleness of much that keeps us divided. In planning together for united work we have learned the possibility of union. What ever may be the final outcome of such organizations as the Christian Endeavor Societies, Church Congresses etc., this much is certain, they have been instrumental in establishing a better feeling among God's people. It would be incorrect to suppose,

however, that the desire for unity is interfering largely with purely denominational activity. On the contrary every sect is pushing its own work, and inculcating its own tenets with unabated vigor. If this seems inconsistent with what I have written above it finds an explanation in the fact that as yet the rank and file of the different churches are not greatly interested in the movement towards union. Here and there a voice lifts itself up from the ranks, crying aloud "let us be one." The leaven has not wrought any great change as yet, but it is cheering to know that it is at work. Every denomination is more than holding its own, but the mighty passion for the conquest of the world for our Lord and His Christ is welling up with increasing power in the hearts of God's people, and is moving them in the direction of united effort for a common end. The feeling is growing, too, that great and imminent dangers threaten the nation, and that these cannot be met save by a united church. In the South and Border States ten millions of ignorant and unchristianized negroes are a growing menace to the peace of the nation. In the East and West, Roman Catholicism is laying her hand on the public school system, that it may be made the ally of the hierarchy. Both the leading political parties are friendly to the saloon. It is the solemn and awful truth that the saloon controls the legislation of the United States, both municipal and national. In the face of such perils, Christians are feeling the weakness of a divided church. The time is come for a holy alliance. Here and there among all the denominational hosts voices are lifted up summoning God's people to meet the foes with an unbroken front, and to give the world the crowning proof of our Lord's divine nature and mission in a united church.

We are not to suppose, however, that all who are making overtures for union are prepared to accept the basis which seems to the Disciples of Christ to be the only practicable one. The overture made by the Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1887 was substantially a proposal to form all other denominations into one Episcopal body—in other words that all should become Episcopalians. At Fort Worth, Texas, the convention of Southern Baptists adopted a resolution inviting a conference of representative men of all denominations for the purpose of discussing those doctrines of the Bible about which differing views are entertained; to the end that some common understanding might be reached, and union made possible. While I am in fullest sympathy with the proposed conference, believing that it would reveal a much more substantial identity of belief than is supposed to exist, yet I do not think it uncharitable to say that the only basis of union which the Southern Baptists would accept at present is the consent of all other bodies to become Baptists. If the tone of the *Western Recorder*, of which the mover of the Fort Worth resolution is Editor, and the universal practice of Southern Baptists, are to be taken as criteria, these dear brethren have no sort of an idea of holding

fellowship with any Christian who is not prepared to endorse every jot and tittle of Baptist teaching and usage. That they ought to yield anything in the interests of union is not, I fear, in any of their thoughts. I count among my nearest friends some of these brethren. I mean to be entirely respectful when I say that if the Southern Baptists are willing to consider the question of Christian Union on any other than a purely Baptist basis I greatly misjudge them, and am ready to believe that the prayer of Jesus is very soon to be answered. It is as well for us to face the fact that all those who claim to be advocates of union are not prepared to adopt the only basis on which it is possible.

Yet after all the fact that the question is being agitated is a most hopeful sign. The fact that the Northern Presbyterian Assembly at its recent meeting was anxious that the revision of their Confession of Faith should not present obstacles to union is cause for rejoicing. Rome was not built in a day, and Christian union will not speedily be accomplished. The present tendency to keep denominational peculiarities in abeyance, and to emphasize truths about which all are agreed will continue to increase. The Disciples of Christ have something to learn in this direction, as well as their neighbors. When we understand that some things most sorely believed among us are as surely theories that are divisive in their tendency as the theories of other peoples, we shall perhaps make them less prominent in our teaching. When we shall have learned that it is far better to know whom we have believed than what we believe, our mission will grow clearer to ourselves, and therefore clearer to others. Union will come. If not till we are gone, then afterwards. It is God's own way to convert the world. His hand is directing the movement and we can await the time of its consummation.

Hopkinsville, Ky.

In and About Toronto.

On the evening of the 24th June there was held a mass meeting of the members of the Christian Endeavor Societies of this city, in the Central Presbyterian church for the purpose of hearing the reports of the delegates sent to the Convention which met in St. Louis. The reports were interesting and encouraging, and the delegates succeeded in imparting somewhat of the enthusiasm which they obtained in St. Louis, as was evidenced by the applause of their audience.

One of the delegates in his report said that at the Convention great stress had been laid upon the fact, that the Y.P.S.C.E. movement was a denominational movement and not a non-denominational one as some seem to maintain, that each society should propagate the doctrines, and work in accord with the rules of the church of which it forms a part. Now while this is true, the movement is not confined to any denomination, it is inter-denominational and as such is accomplishing much good; it is a movement tending toward Christian Union, wheth-

or its promoters are aware of the fact or not; but all movements which encourage the study of the Bible tend towards union; one book one people. The object of the movement is to get the young people engaged in active Christian work. We all know how difficult it is for a young Christian to take part in a prayer-meeting service when fathers and mothers, etc., etc., are present. These meetings overcome that obstacle.

The Canadian delegates were entertained by the first Christian church of St. Louis. Before the close of the meeting a very hearty vote of thanks was tendered to said church. The mover said some very kind things of our brethren. There is an effort being made to bring the Convention to Toronto in 1892.

Were you at the Summer Carnival? I was. I went to see what a Carnival was; about all I saw was a great crowd of people going hither and thither. Then we had summer, there was no doubt about that, so I concluded that a Summer Carnival consisted in gathering, by newspaper announcements, etc., together a great many people in the summer time. Then the question arose in my mind what could be the object of such an assemblage? Certainly not the benefit of those who came. What then? Why it was a gigantic scheme gotten up for the benefit of the railroads, hotels, restaurants, etc. A very worthy (3) object indeed. Fearing that I might be wrong in my definition of Carnival I thought I would consult a lexicon and see what the lexicographers had to say about it. Here is what they say: Carnival, lit., solace of the flesh, farrowl to meat; a festival celebrated with revelry and merriment in Roman Catholic countries during the week before Lent. The Toronto Summer Carnival certainly was not the first of these, for there was no comfort to the flesh in being jostled about, with the temperature 90° in the shade. No there was no comfort in it. I assure you the dictionary is wrong in that meaning; the second meaning, "a farrowl to meat," I fancy is nearer the mark judging from the number of gaunt individuals I saw; they looked as though they had abstained from that article of food and would likely continue to do so until they had replenished an empty purse. Part of the third meaning seems to be applicable; there was considerable "merriment and revelry" in some quarters, but I failed to see the "festival" part. Then as to ours being a "Roman Catholic country," I hardly know what to say; there are so many conflicting opinions regarding it; then, too, this is not the week before "Lent." I think sir the dictionaries are altogether wrong, and I think also that the Carnival must have been "lent."

Switzerland now contains in round numbers 1,750,000 Protestants, 1,200,000 Roman Catholics, 8,300 Jews, and 10,700 persons who either represent other religions or are entirely non-religious. A comparison with the records of former years shows that the Protestants are gaining upon the Catholics. The same thing is said to be true in Germany.

Philadelphia Letter.

The Philadelphia Baptist Conference listened last Monday morning to a paper by Rev. R. W. Patton, of Mecca, Pa., on the following subject: "Are the Doctrinal Positions on Baptism of the Baptists and Disciples Approximating Each Other?"

This is the largest conference of Baptist ministers in the United States, having a membership of one hundred and sixty, and comprising some of the ablest men in the denomination. It was with no little interest, therefore, that I attended and observed the spirit in which this question was discussed.

Let me say, in passing, that several prominent Baptist writers in and around Philadelphia have, of late, been taking advanced ground upon the subject of the design of baptism. Among these may be mentioned Dr. Russell, H. Conwell, Dr. Stifler and Dr. Johnson, of Crozier Theological Seminary. They have been taunted with showing a bias toward "Campbellism." Dr. Patton, who read the paper, is of this number. They frankly put such passages as Acts ii. 38, Mark xvi. 16, Acts xxii. 16, at their critics, and ask what they are going to do with them. One of these, authorities anticipating the charge of heresy, thus declares himself:—

I am not responsible for what the Bible says about baptism. Had I been, the lotter of it would have been much less comfortable for the followers of Alexander Campbell and high Churchmen generally.

Mr. Patton, in his paper, proposed three general heads to show (1) that the Baptists have made certain modifications in their views of the design of baptism; (2) that the Disciples have, to some extent, receded from the extreme position of Alexander Campbell and the Reformers of fifty years ago; (3) that those changes are in the direction of a unity of position on this subject. A few quotations from the paper will show the drift of treatment. Under the first head he cited the Confession of Faith and elder Baptist writers to show that formerly the theory of baptism had been altogether the symbolic or sacramentarian view, while in later years it was coming to be regarded as having a more important relation to remission of sins. Speaking of the language of the Confession of Faith, he says:—

We find that the statement was endorsed by the leaders of our denomination in the days that are past.

Dr. Carson says:—
Baptism washes away sins, not because it is the first ordinance, but because it is an emblematical washing of the body with water. We wash away sins in baptism just as we eat the flesh of Jesus in the Lord's Supper.

Dr. Francis Wayland, expressing the views of Baptists, says:—
The person baptized abjures the world and enters into covenant with God—he was dead in sin, he is now alive unto God. This is what we suppose is meant to be symbolized in the ordinance of baptism.

Thus in the old times it was all upon the basis that baptism is only a symbol. (Continued on page 8.)