

A LIVELY MEETING.

A Scene in the Presbyterian Council.

Canadian Representatives on Their Mettle.

The Pan Presbyterian Council met at Philadelphia last week and is still in session. We are unable to give the proceedings in full. The following from the excellent report of Monday's proceedings in the New York Sun shows how Canadian delegates are able to hold their own amongst their brethren all over the world. It will be of special interest to our Presbyterian readers. It says:—

The Rev. Dr. A. B. Van Zandt, of New Brunswick, N. J., read a paper on "Creeds." He reviewed the objection usually urged against the acceptance of prescribed formulas of belief, that they disparage the Scriptures and check theological progress, and argued that these views are based upon a misapprehension of the use of creeds, which, he said are ordained not to create, but to express a belief, and which are not made but grow. In considering the differences which exist as to the obligations incurred in subscribing to creeds or confessions, the author advised conservatism in the exercise of authority.

Prof. Flint's paper on agnosticism caused a little breeze to sweep over the Council. The delegates have had two nights to sleep over this paper and to weigh carefully its utterances. That they did so, the somewhat exciting debate of the morning indicates. Perhaps it was well that the hour of adjournment brought a sudden stop to the discussion, for some of these divines were getting greatly excited. The venerable Dr. Armstrong, of Norfolk, said that Prof. Flint had spoken sneeringly of church discipline, and the Rev. Dr. De Witt, of Philadelphia, had characterized something that the Rev. Principal Grant, of Canada, had said as most vicious. The debate revealed one thing very clearly: That the Scottish and Canadian delegates favor more of free thought and liberality than do the American delegates.

The little thorn that had pricked the delegate who opposed Prof. Flint was an assertion of his that the failure to comprehend or to believe portions of the Presbyterian dogma was to be overcome not by church discipline so much as by a more faithful study and explanation of dogma. Prof. Flint seemed to intimate that it was quite possible that the future of theology might modify, or at least clarify these troublesome dogmas. Such an assertion, coming from so eminent an authority, was what troubled the strict constructionists, and gave comfort to the liberals. It certainly revealed the fact that there are still some points in that pillar of the faith, the Westminster catechism, that some of the clergy are not at all clear about. Prof. Flint, while claiming that it tended to the spread of any further light, or that investigation in theology can go no further by inference, at least opened the way for permitting the doubting Presbyterian to remain inside the fold. That is something that some of the delegates plainly felt would never do.

No sooner had the morning papers been read than Dr. Andrews mounted the platform and raised his voice in vigorous protest against such an utterance, and he attracted attention to himself strangely enough by saying at the outset that Prof. Flint had spoken sneeringly of church discipline. Dr. Andrews wanted to know how you were going to stop that propagation of error except through church discipline. Here the venerable gentleman waxed hot. "Is it honorable," asked he, "is it honorable for a minister to go on preaching in my denomination who believes in what my church does not believe, what it in fact abhors? Let such a minister go out of the church, and then let him teach what he pleases."

This caused some confusion. It was getting right down to the marrow of the most vital question that stares clergymen to-day in the face, and which one delegate expressed thus: "Shall we, holding commissions to preach from the Presbyterian Church, and not believing in all points precisely, as the accepted interpretation of the creed requires us to believe stay in the church or go outside of it?"

Several delegates rose to reply, but not one Scotchman or Irishman. It seemed to be the feeling among them that as Dr. Flint had been accused of sneering by an American, they would leave it for Americans to defend him. A youthful American divine, Dr. Boggs, got the platform, and while he was more gentle in his use of terms his condemnation of Prof. Flint's utterances was no less marked than was that of Dr. Andrews. Dr. Boggs asserted categorically—and he faced Prof. Flint and made his assertion sternly—that the great discoveries in theology are behind us—not in the future. Theology, he said was allied to astronomy in this respect, and to geology. When Dr. Boggs made this point blank assertion, the impetuous blood of Principal Grant of Canada caused him to rise and it seemed as though he was to speak then and there. But he restrained himself and waited his opportunity. Dr. Flint who ranks with the ablest theologians of Great Britain,

could not restrain a slight smile as Dr. Boggs made the assertion. Dr. Boggs went further. He said that it was most unmanly for a preacher who has doubts to conceal them. "Let him come forward like a man and tell the Church these doubts, and then we can say whether he shall stay with us or not."

Attacked thus furiously by two Americans, Dr. Flint had need of a champion and he got one, Not from Scotland. Prof. Calderwood sat there, calm, intense, but quiet. The impulsive Dr. Hutton sat with his eyes fixed on the speakers, but he made no motion as of rising. Dr. Watts sat with bowed head. Principal Cairn showed no disposition of defending his friend. In fact the silence of Scotland was impressive.

Canada sent a fiery delegate to the theologian's defence, The Rev. Principal Grant hurled back the accusation that Dr. Flint had sneered, "I detected no sneer sir, in Prof. Flint's address. He is not the man to sneer. He has the courage of his opinions, and he will say boldly what he believes without any sneering. What he meant to convey was that if we try to reach doubt, by church discipline, instead of by an effort for broader, clearer thought and a deeper search into the truths of theology—if thus we try to reach, doubtless we shall lead the way to agnosticism." Here there was applause, and none applauded louder than did many of the Scotch delegates. Principal Grant then made a bold assault. Think of the advance of liberalism when a Scotch Canadian Presbyterian faces the leaders of this Church from all over the world and says these words: "We do err if we say the Westminster Catechism is beyond the region of inquiry. Creeds grow and how can there be growth unless there is liberty of thought. You say to a minister, if he has doubts about the accuracy of your interpretation, 'Go out of the church.' You say no honest man should stay in if he has doubt. You call him dishonest if he does stay in. I say no, no, let the Church cast him out if it will." There was more applause, but there were many delegates who heard the vehement protests and utterances with solemn faces. "Is the church afraid of liberty?" were Principal Grant's closing words, and he said them in ringing tones whose echo seemed to be heard above the applause they occasioned.

Principal Cavan of Toronto, a man of quiet method of speech, told the delegates plainly that in his opinion it was a life or death question with the Presbyterian Church whether you can expect such progress in dogma that you can discipline for not accepting it. Thus again from Canada came the intimation of a protest against what Prof. Grant called "illiberality."

Then a zealous, fiery young divine, the Rev. Mr. McDonnell of Toronto, mounted the platform. He plunged boldly into his subject. He spoke with the rapidity that comes from overflowing thought. He asked whether it was expedient for the Church always to exercise its unquestioned right of disciplining. "The question to-day is, what is the faith? A young man full of the desire to preach salvation, and believing that he is prepared for it, is brought up all standing by the creed. He can't make it all out, in the way the church interprets it. What are you going to do with him? Shall he be forbidden to preach? He asks you whether you have any right to impose on him conditions that Christ did not impose. Well, you tell him there are other churches, fifty others that he can go and preach in, but you don't find anything in the New Testament about fifty churches. Only one is spoken of there. Suppose you send such a man over to the Methodists or Congregationalists. The first thing you do is to exchange pulpits with him and call him 'beloved brother.' Thus you admit that you restrict as Christ did not restrict. Now I suggest that you reduce to a few well-defined articles that are absolutely essential your creed, and require your minister to stand by these and hold his own views about the non-essentials." There was more applause when this daring divine had finished.

Dr. De Witt of Philadelphia was the last speaker. He said that Prof. Flint had not sneered. He also said that he regarded the assertions made by Principal Grant as most vicious.

The chairman's hammer here brought discussion to an end, but the delegates kept it up among themselves, some of them until the afternoon hour.

LEIGH HUNT ON BURNS.—"It has been well observed by somebody," says Leigh Hunt, "that Burns was not so uneducated a man as is supposed. He had books, and some good teaching, and was acquainted, at an early period, with some of the best writers. The intelligent part of what are called the uneducated are apt to be better instructed than is supposed, and many a workman and peasant would surprise people, if they talked with him, with the amount of his acquired knowledge and his habits of reflection." In the same essay in which he makes this remark, Hunt adds: "When the Scottish poet wrote English only, he sometimes affected words fine enough. It was the only evidence of a defective education betrayed by his style."

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