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FOR TERMS, ETC., SEE EIGHTH PAGE.
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Editor and Proprietor.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

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British American Presbyterian, FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 1876.

OUR GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

The event to which we have been looking forward for a year has at length transpired—the meeting in Toronto of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. For some weeks our streets have been thronged with “the Cloth,” and indeed with all kinds, and varieties of those who belong to this profession. We have within a brief period had every sort of meeting. There have been meetings of Bible Societies, meetings of Missionary Societies, meetings of Christian Associations and of Sabbath School teachers. Conferences of various denominations have been held. And now we are honoured with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. Toronto has hitherto enjoyed the reputation of being an ecclesiastical centre. Our City this year resembles Edinburgh, the modern Athens of Scotland. An academic aroma fills the air. It is rapidly becoming a more and more important seat of learning. Not only are all the professions well represented, but we have schools and colleges in abundance for the preparation of young men to enter their ranks. But above all we have this great gathering of divines, reminding us of the streets of Edinburgh during the period allotted to the General Assemblies. Like that metropolis too in the “ecclesiastical season,” our city has arrayed herself in her most beautiful attire, as if to do honour to her numerous guests. The atmosphere is filled with fragrant perfumes. The trees have reached the very perfection of beauty. Refreshing showers have preserved the verdure and the blossom. Calm breezes have floated in upon us from the great lake; all reminding these assembled Christians of the moral beauty and spiritual fruitfulness that result when the dews of Hermon come down, and the genial winds of heaven blow softly upon the gardens of their souls.

On Thursday last, Knox Church was, by the time appointed for opening the Assembly, well filled with ministers and elders. Besides, there was a large number, including many ladies, who were evidently interested in the proceedings. The retiring Moderator, Rev. Dr. Cook, of Quebec, preached a very able and eloquent sermon. He commenced by stating that there are two books—those of Nature and Revelation—that bear the impress of the Creator. He then went on to show that as investigation into the works of Nature leads to the discovery of hidden principles, and to new inventions, so the student of Scripture might hope to be rewarded with the discovery of fresh meanings of many passages, and with the knowledge of principles that, like latent heat in the ground, had hitherto lain out of sight, unnoticed and unknown. The Church did not claim to be infallible, either as to the declaration of the mind of God, or in its interpretation of His Word. It was quite conceivable that many portions of the Bible were to-day read and interpreted in an entirely different way from what they would be in the future. There was thus not only a necessity for scholarship, but for students being very earnest and diligent in their investigations into the meanings of Scripture. The second part of the sermon, which dealt with new applications of the long discovered principles of Christianity to the many fields of work and enterprise that were only opening to the Church, was exceedingly interesting and instructive.

The election of a Moderator, immediately after constituting the Assembly, engaged the attention of members. Though Rev. Mr. McTavish of Woodstock received the deserved honour of a nomination, it was felt by all, that in all the circumstances Dr. Topp should be elected to the Chair by acclamation. It was in vain for the minister of Knox Church to decline. He was evidently most anxious to do so. But the Assembly was bent on having him for Moderator. No doubt the fact of Dr. Topp being a leading minister of the former Canada Presbyterian Church, the popular pastor of Knox Church, in which the Assembly was convened, and a highly esteemed citizen of Toronto, and being widely known throughout the Dominion, weighed with his brethren in their choice of him their presiding officer. But there was more than this. He was well fitted by voice and manner, by knowledge of Church law, and by his innate dignity, to occupy the high position with honor to himself

and credit to the Church of which he is a minister. Dr. Topp on assuming the Moderator's Chair delivered an *extempore* address most appropriate to the occasion; whole comprehensive in its structure, was forcible in utterance, and eloquent in its earnestness.

The various discussions, which up to this writing have taken place in the Assembly, have been conducted with much spirit and at the same time with remarkable composure. In fact, if all the speeches which are yet to be delivered, are like the most of those we have heard, it will be a model Assembly. The narrative of the State of Religion which was read by Rev. Mr. Wardrop of Guelph, was a valuable paper. It showed that earnest workers were in every part of the field, that many new churches were springing up, that the sustentation of pastors was improving, that Sabbath Schools were everywhere flourishing, and that missionary effort was showing more vigor than at any former period. The meeting of Friday evening, at which this was read, was a very precious one, in which were mingled earnest petitions for the revival of God's work with rejoicing hallelujahs for the triumphant advances of the Redeemer's kingdom.

Several votes have shown that while the Assembly is conservative it is also liberal. The decision, upon the request of the congregation of Amherst to be allowed the use of instrumental music in worship, was both wise and timely. It asserted the right of a people to enjoy the use of an organ, provided it was their unanimous desire to have it. The Canadian Church in this respect is thus on a footing with the United Presbyterian and Established Churches of Scotland, and with the American Presbyterian Churches in all, of which the right to the use of instrumental music in worship has been allowed. The vote upon the question as to whether the Assembly should observe the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper also pointed in the liberal direction. It was all but unanimous, and the decision we are happy to say was amply justified by the refreshing service of Communion in which so many of the brethren were last Sabbath afternoon privileged to engage.

Truly we may say we are justly proud of having the Supreme Court of the Church, which we have the honor to represent, sitting in our midst. It is necessarily a large body, not being as yet representative in its character, but an Assembly of all the ministers of the Church, and of all elders and others entitled to sit as members, while it is mixed in point of its nationalities, and in regard to the various denominations which last year were united in one Church, it is yet homogeneous. It is a concourse of men that any country may well be proud of, representing so much of the education, the intelligence and enterprise of the age in which we live. As an Assembly of Christian men, it is not only as to appearance but in the spirit which animates it, a living monument to the power and value of our religion. Take any concourse of men equal numerically to these, who are not Christians in profession, and who are occupied in rum selling, or in gambling, and we are confident the comparison would not be favourable to the latter. In our next issue we trust to say something more by way of running commentary upon our great General Assembly.

THE LATE REV. JOHN MCCOLL.

We deeply regret to have to record the death of this talented minister of the Gospel, at the early age of 37. Mr. McColl was born in Oban, Argyshire, Scotland, and came to this country with his parents when very young. Soon after finishing his theological course in Knox College he was ordained and inducted into the pastoral charge of Dundas, on the 24th day of October, 1855, where he laboured with considerable success till 1872, when he was called to succeed the Rev. William Ormiston, D.D., in the pastorate of the Central Church, Hamilton—one of the largest congregations within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. He laboured in Hamilton with faithfulness, diligence and success till last July, when he was laid aside by sickness. Last fall on the advice of his physician he went to California to spend the winter in the milder climate of that country. It was earnestly hoped that he would return this summer restored to health and strength, but to the sad disappointment of his people who learned to appreciate his worth and were very much attached to him, and to the sad disappointment of his numerous friends throughout the country, he came back in a very feeble condition, and rapidly grew worse till Wednesday the 7th day of this month, when he passed to his reward.

His funeral, which was very large, took place last Saturday, and was attended by the members of the Hamilton Presbytery, of which he was a member, and by a large number of other ministers from a distance. The services in connection with the funeral were conducted in the Church and were very impressive. The Rev. Alex. Grant, Moderator of Presbytery, presided. The Rev. S. C. Fraser, of Thorold, read appropriate portions of Scripture, the Rev. Alex.

Dawson, of Beamsville, led in prayer, in which earnest and affectionate petitions were offered up on behalf of the widow, children and friends of the deceased, and also on behalf of the congregation. Appropriate and feeling addresses were delivered by the Rev. Alex. Topp, D.D., of Toronto, a former pastor, and by the Rev. D. H. Fletcher, an intimate friend and co-Presbyter of the deceased.

We subjoin from the Hamilton Times Mr. Fletcher's touching address. The rev. gentleman said:—

“I have been asked to say a few words on this solemn occasion. Although there are older members of Presbytery present who have been most intimate with our deceased brother, there is, perhaps, a propriety in my saying a few words, for I have known more or less intimately our departed friend for the long period of 18 years. I have been closely associated with him in various departments of Christian work during the last four years. I have also enjoyed the privilege of speaking to him of our Blessed Saviour, and of praying with him during the few days it pleased the Lord to spare him to us after his return home. This is not the time to speak of the valuable services which the deceased rendered as a member of the Hamilton Presbytery. The members of that body know and appreciate the faithfulness, wisdom, and diligence which characterized him in the discharge of the duties committed to him. The afflicting hand of God has been severely laid upon us as a Presbytery during this year. The removal by death of Mr. Rensselaer and Mr. McColl so soon after one another have made a sad blank in our number. We bow in humble submission to God's will, and pray that this afflictive dispensation may be sanctified to us all. I will not speak of the labours of our friend as the pastor of the large congregation which worship in this sanctuary. The members of the congregation know better than I do with what faithfulness, affection and success he discharged his numerous pastoral duties; neither will I speak of the willingness, readiness and ability with which he responded to the calls made upon him by the various benevolent institutions of this city, suffice it to say that he was always ready to oblige and benefit his fellow citizens. I shall content myself in saying a few words about the close of his life, which to those who loved him were beautiful and comforting. Last fall, on the advice of his physician, he left us to spend the winter in the milder climate of California. Although the communications received from him from time to time were far from being encouraging, yet we fondly hoped that the Lord, in His great mercy, would bring him back to us greatly restored to health and strength. But it hath pleased Him who doeth all things wisely and well, to bring him back to us to die in our midst, not to labour again in His vineyard, but to pass away from the scene of his labours to that blessed rest that remaineth for the sons of holy toil. I saw him soon after reaching home. He then gave me to understand that he felt sure his life was ebbing fast away, that there was no hope of ultimate recovery. Among other things he said, ‘This will be a sad disappointment to my dear people, who have been so kind to me. I should feel thankful if God would enable me to preach the Gospel to them again, but He hath evidently ordered otherwise. Well, there are no disappointments with God. His plans and His ways are all perfect. I wish you to speak to me of heart religion and of the wonderful love of Jesus.’ After praying together he said ‘Come and see me as often as you can and speak to me of Jesus and His love.’ On Monday morning after giving him, at his own request, the substance of the sermons which I preached on the preceding Sabbath, he said, ‘O brother, what a wonderful privilege it is to preach the Gospel of God's grace. O, what honour God confers on feeble imperfect men when He calls them to be co-workers together with Him in saving men. I should rejoice to preach the Gospel of Christ's love again, but let God's will be done. His will is the best. Death hath made sad blanks among our dear friends since I went away. It is still at work. Oh, what a glorious reunion awaits the friends of Jesus in the home above, where there shall be no death and no parting!’ Early on Wednesday morning, while we were praying with him, pleading with the Blessed Master to strengthen and comfort His servant in the valley of the shadow of death, he fell asleep in Jesus. There is one remark which I wish to make, and it is this, that during my interviews with our departed friend, I felt convinced that his long illness was greatly blessed to him—that in his affliction he was greatly sanctified, grew much in heavenly-mindedness, ripened for glory. It is sad to see one, comparatively young in years, taken away in the midst of his numerous cares, usefulness and responsibility, and leave a sad blank behind. It is sad to see the reaper laying down his sickle and called home to rest, while the harvest is ripe and heaviest, and the day requires every worker to be up and doing. To us the death of these seems strange and mysterious, but to God it is precious, and could we draw aside the mysterious veil which conceals the future, we should then see that God hath made everything beautiful in its season, and that no believer dies an untimely death. While we express our tenderest sympathy with the sorrowing relatives and friends, in their sad loss, we bid them remember that their cup of affliction is mingled with mercy, inasmuch as God had brought back their beloved one to die in his own home surrounded by his nearest and dearest friends. We bid them feel thankful that they are not left to mourn as those who have no hope.”

The Rev. J. C. Smith closed the service at the grave by offering up an earnest prayer.

Mr. McColl, we understand, leaves a widow and four young children to mourn his loss. She and the children and the congregation of Central Church have our deep sympathy in their sore bereavement. The Rev. Dr. Topp of this city is expected to preach the funeral sermon next Sabbath.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY. (Continued from first page.)

endorsed the interpretation put upon it by Principal Caven, he (Prof. McLaren) had not another word to say. Unfortunately—perhaps for Mr. Macdonnell's view—he (Mr. Macdonnell) did rise and make a statement, which, to the minds of a number of the members of Presbytery conveyed an impression which was different from the interpretation which was put upon this statement by Principal Caven. After listening to the explanations which Mr. Macdonnell gave himself, and looking at all the circumstances under which it was given, while he did not feel himself then prepared to take the responsibility of voting against the motion submitted by Principal Caven in whose judgment and thorough loyalty to the truth he had the most unlimited confidence he could not on the other hand vote against it. He was therefore one of a considerable number of members of the Presbytery who on that occasion did not vote at all; he thought he must take further time to look into the matter and weigh it thoroughly. When the Presbytery took up the matter of the sermon in October last there were various courses that seemed open to them. They might, for example, have dismissed the matter by simply giving Mr. Macdonnell an admonition to be more careful in the future and not to speak in such unguarded language; and he presumed that had there been the very slightest expression at that time of regret for any of the sentiments contained in the sermon, that would have been the course that would have commended itself to the Presbytery. But there were no expressions of regret then. There had been some recently, but he (Prof. McLaren) did not think they were quite as strong as Principal Caven put them. The Presbytery felt, therefore, that they could not take that course. Another which they might have taken was to proceed at once by libel. They thought, however, that would be a pretty stringent course, and were very reluctant to do anything of that kind. The determination which they ultimately arrived at was to give Mr. Macdonnell time, and if they could get a statement from him to the effect that he was in accord with the church, let the matter drop without any admonition of him or any humiliation whatever. He gave several statements which the Presbytery could not see their way to accept; and when he (Prof. McLaren) looked into the last statement, and when Mr. Macdonnell, as he did, told them that that was not intended to contain anything different from the previous statements, he (Prof. McLaren) thought it was not at all satisfactory either. Another point was that the doubt expressed in the sermon was, after the lapse of six months, re-expressed in Mr. Macdonnell's statements. According to the exposition of Prof. Caven and Mr. King the last statement but one was equivalent to an affirmative answer to the question which the Committee of the Presbytery put to him except for the last clause, “expressed as it is almost in the language of Scripture.” But Mr. Macdonnell would not omit that clause, and therefore it was evident that he could not give that admission to the doctrine in question which was required of him. Subsequently he submitted another statement, the one they were now asked to accept, but since it was not intended to imply anything more than the preceding one; why then trouble and perplex the Presbytery with it, for if the preceding statement was not satisfactory neither under the circumstances could the last be. What they wished to find out was not that he continued his admission, but what they wished to find out was whether, after study, his mind had reached the point that the church demanded from its ministers. What they wanted to know was whether he was in accord with the church, which was simply a question of admission. The admission which Mr. Macdonnell said had continued was one which must have continued during the time he preached that sermon, and during the time that he made the objectionable statements. He thought that if he was prepared to give an unqualified adherence the whole proceedings would be terminated. He therefore moved that the reference be sustained, and that having respect to the terms in which Mr. Macdonnell's last statement was couched, and all the circumstances of the case, could not be regarded as satisfactory, and that nothing less would satisfy the church than that Mr. Macdonnell should declare that notwithstanding any difficulties he might have, he believes the doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the subject of future punishment as founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and that in his teaching he would faithfully adhere thereto, and that the Assembly would call upon Mr. Macdonnell to make such a declaration. (Applause.) He thought they should have some expression from Mr. Macdonnell that his doubts did not imply a disbelief in this doctrine. That was all they wanted, and that was all the Presbytery had been trying to get from him time after time. He did not think there was a moment at which Mr. Macdonnell could not have terminated the proceedings by such a declaration as they asked, and after all this trouble, and after all the proceedings it had entailed, if Mr. Macdonnell was willing to give such a statement in good conscience, he, as a Christian brother, should at once do it, and let them feel that full confidence in him which everyone of them would like to cherish. He thought that in consideration of the way in which the sermon had raised doubts in the minds of his brethren, he could not do less than indicate that such was the state of his mind.

Rev. Prof. McKerran said that Prof. McLaren had laid great stress on the fact that Mr. Macdonnell declined to answer the question as to whether he was prepared to signify his admission to the teaching of the Confession of Faith. He asked if the question did not really hinge on the attitude submitted to Mr. Macdonnell to the effect that the evidence for the doctrine was seen to be of such weight that the mind, notwithstanding difficulties, whether in connection with the evidence or in connection with the relation of the doctrine to

other doctrines, really embraced it as true?

Rev. Prof. McLaren replied in the affirmative.

Rev. Prof. McKerran asked if Mr. Macdonnell did not state that the question was expressed too strongly, or he would have accepted it?

Rev. Prof. McLaren said that Mr. Macdonnell might have said that. All the Presbytery wanted to know was that his mind was not in an attitude of non-belief. If there was an attitude between unbelief and belief he did not know what it was.

Rev. Mr. Hall seconded Prof. McLaren's motion.

Rev. Dr. Taylor, of Montreal, said he was not satisfied with any of the motions, and he had prepared one which he thought met the requirements of the case. It was evident to them all that Mr. Macdonnell was in a tight place; in fact he acknowledged that by declaring that it was unwisdom on his part to preach the sermon and that he regretted having done so. He (Dr. Taylor) therefore recommended the acceptance of the final statement. He did not like to see a brother badgered, and he did not think that the Assembly should refuse to be satisfied with anything less than bringing Mr. Macdonnell down on his knees before the Court and acknowledging that he had done wrong. His motion was that the reference should be sustained, and that the action of the Presbytery of Toronto should be approved in its faithful defence of and vindication of that important article of the Christian Faith; yet, instead of sending the case to that Presbytery for final adjudication the Assembly should take it into its own hands and declare its willingness to accept Mr. Macdonnell's final statement and to drop further proceedings in the matter. The motion concluded in the following words:—“At the same time the Assembly feels called on to record its continued adherence to that doctrine of the Confession of Faith which has been called in question, and also declares that while ever ready to deal kindly and tenderly with those who may be perplexed with the difficulties connected with the mysteries and deep things of God, it warns all against giving place in their public ministrations to the unsettling of the faith of men.”

Rev. Mr. Melville sympathized with Mr. Macdonnell. He felt sure that the same sincerity which led him to speak as he felt, would eventually lead him to declare his entire adherence to the Confession of Faith. He concluded by seconding the motion.

Rev. Dr. Macleise said he was abundantly satisfied with the position which Mr. Macdonnell had been able to assume. He felt that none of the members of the Assembly could doubt Mr. Macdonnell's honesty; it was the intensity of his honesty that prevented him from assuming that position before. (Cries of “vote!” “vote!”)

Rev. Mr. McTavish rose to speak, and the cries of vote were continued.

Rev. Mr. Sedgewick rose to a point of order, and deprecated the unseemly noise that was being made in a particular part of the church, and hoped he would hear no more of it.

Rev. Mr. McTavish (Woodstock), said they might have a vote, and they might vote him down, but they might well consider what the result would be. He had his convictions on the point, and by the help of his convictions he would endeavour to bring about the result. He laboured earnestly to get a basis of union such as he could honestly concede to, and having got that basis he did all he could to lead others into the union. He now felt that the basis was being violated if that statement was accepted. In the event of its acceptance he could tell the Assembly that what he had done he would undo.

At this point there were cries of order, which the Moderator silenced by stating that there should be freedom of speech in the Assembly within legitimate bounds.

Rev. Mr. McTavish continued by stating that they could silence him by noise but he could appeal elsewhere. If the question to be settled were merely a point of fact he would not bring the personal into it. But was not a point affecting the truth. The subject appeared to be the retaining or having Mr. Macdonnell in the Church. He had desired that and he was just as unwilling that Mr. Macdonnell should leave the Church as others were, but he ventured to say that there were other people who had as good a right to be considered as Mr. Macdonnell. The statement to which Mr. Macdonnell had assented was not his own, and he explained it in one way and Principal Caven explained it in another. By the acceptance of the statement Mr. Macdonnell would be allowed the liberty he desired, and that was to say that the punishment was possibly eternal and possibly not. That was one of Mr. Macdonnell's statements. In another he said that God had not revealed to us what he would do in the future. His statement that he continued his admission to the Confession of Faith, as had been remarked, must have referred to an admission that continued when he preached the sermon and when he made the statements, which could not be accepted, before the Presbytery. He (Mr. McTavish) asked them to consider if they had any refutation or retraction of Mr. Macdonnell's views? He thought not, and he looked upon the acceptance of such a statement as a downright violation of the terms of the union. He desired to be better satisfied than he was before he would accept any explanation except Mr. Macdonnell's own. He considered it very unwise to put words into Mr. Macdonnell's mouth, and he did not think there was any necessity for Principal Caven to explain Mr. Macdonnell's statement for him.

Principal Caven said he did not explain the statement for Mr. Macdonnell; he simply explained it.

Rev. Mr. McTavish wanted to have an explanation from the person whose signature it bore. He sympathized with a man who had difficulties; so far as he was concerned he had none himself. He urged the House to consider the steps they were taking before they went so far as to declare that they would retain in the Church persons who declared that they believed neither in annihilation nor restoration, yet hoped that one of them was a fact. If he understood the statement right, Mr. Macdonnell hoped that there would be