

the churches care for themselves alone." Neither is the statement correct with reference to the Missionary Society. I have referred to the Year Book and found that 98 per cent. of our churches contributed to this society last year. The writer speaks of some churches refraining to give, who are "well able" to do so. What churches are referred to? I find by the Year Book that all the churches in Montreal have contributed, the two churches in Kingston, all the churches in Toronto, except Yorkville.

Will the writer state what churches he refers to. It is not fair to the denomination to give such a distorted view of our work. Then as to that doleful wail about our being the "smallest and weakest," etc. But I will not attempt to characterize this Jeremiad. Only "I say it is a shame," and "it is a great pity," and "it is too bad," for a writer to so misrepresent the spirit and work of our denomination in Canada.

And now, dear Editor, just a word to you personally. You seem to have been in the blues too. A "denominational danger" looms up before your editorial vision. Is it really true that our young men, ministers I presume you mean, laugh to scorn all that our fathers held "in regard to the atonement, work of the Holy Spirit," etc.

Is it correct to say that they "regard one faith about as good as another." We have heard many of our young men preach, and have conversed with them freely and never yet got the impression that they were so un-Christian. I believe that if you go into all our churches, without one exception, you will find that the saving truth of the Gospel of Christ are preached with clearness and earnestness. But I have already taken too much of your time. We like the INDEPENDENT. The children are greatly helped in preparing their Sunday School lessons by it. And husband says the news column alone is worth the price of the paper. Yours truly,

Montreal, May 24th, 1879. ANTI-DYSPEPTIC.

THE DOCTRINAL BASIS OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

A paper on the above subject was read before the State Conference of the Ohio Congregational churches, on the 7th inst., by the Rev. James Brand, of Oberlin. The writer did not undertake to lay down a new basis, but simply discussed the question suggested by Dr. Walcott: "Whether the time has not come for a new declaration of faith by our churches; a formula that shall not be mainly a re-affirmation of our old-time Confessions, but one that shall state in precise terms, in our living tongue, the doctrines which we hold to-day." This same question has been asked and discussed by the Congregationalists of Canada. The last two meetings of the Union have been made memorable by a formulation of the doctrines commonly believed by our churches. We give the substance of Mr. Brand's able paper, believing that it will be of interest and profit to all our readers—liberal and conservative alike.

After stating that the Savoy declaration of 1658 has been the recognized doctrinal basis of the Congregational churches of America, up to date, he asks the question:—

"Is it expedient for us to make a new declaration on the basis of the old, and thus lay aside forever those sacred words 'for substance of doctrine?' Shall we make a new symbol of our own, adapted to the times in which we live—scriptural, large, robust, healthy and health-giving, or, shall we still continue to gather reverently, from time to time, with tonics and titration, about the body of the old?"

"The mission of the Congregational churches is not primarily to propagate their polity, but their doctrines. Their polity is only a convenient human tool; their doctrines are the tools of God. Every church of the denomination has for its true business in the world, the exemplification, extension and perpetuation of the 'truth as it is in Jesus.'

"The ultimate aim of every creed, whether local or general, like that of every renewed life, should be wholly practical; viz., to enlarge and perpetuate the efficiency of the whole Gospel as a spiritualizing power.

"Would there not be a real advantage in a declaration of faith that was up to the last results of Christian thought? For one, I believe that there would, and that the time has come to prepare for such a re-statement."

The writer defends the utility of such doctrinal statements, quoting, that "when rightly used, they are systematized summaries of the doctrines of the Bible, aids to its sound understanding, bonds of union among their professors, public standards and guards against false doctrine and practice." And thinks that "the Congregational body is bound to give to the world the best statement of Christian truth it can."

His reasons for the need of a new declaration of faith are, first, that the old is practically unknown, and quotes Dr. Stoughton, who says, "The Savoy Declaration, which perhaps never had much weight with Congregationalists—is a document now little known except by historical students." His second and chief objection to the Savoy Declaration is that it does not meet the wants of the present age. We have outgrown its modes of expression. It does not meet the current errors of to-day, neither does it express the doctrinal views of the Congregational body to-day. Particularly is this true in reference to the doctrine of decrees. He argues that as the Savoy Declaration grew out of the unrest of that age, and was the cure for the errors of that day, so the unsettled conditions of theological thought, and the current errors of to-day, demand from the Church a new declaration of faith. Hence he says:—

"When speculative opinions are at the front, when Biblical truths are assailed, when human passions are being aroused in defence of both creedless liberalism and equally objectionable creed-bound exclusiveness—when the absorbing question of our times is, as to what the fundamental doctrines of the evangelical system are, we are justified by historical precedent in saying that the time is at hand for a new symbol. This unrest has arisen in a natural way out of the progress of Biblical science and the inevitable growth of society away from the human statements of the past. In the words of President Woolsey, 'The great desideratum is a symbol flexible and yet fixed, obedient to the necessities of the times, yet adhering to the unchanging principles of Christianity.'

"Let us now specify some of the general advantages that would result from a wise, comprehensive, Biblical, independent declaration of faith which should be in all respects abreast of our own times.

"1. It would give us a symbol couched in the phraseology of our own day instead of the antiquated, and sometimes obsolete terms of 200 years ago. The old scholastic forms are 'apt to degenerate into a dry and sterile intellectualism, and to provoke a reaction,' while the familiar language of to-day would express the life of to-day. One of the reasons for the revision of the English Scriptures, is the fact, that in the progress of society, language changes its meaning. This argument is equally good in favour of a revision of the Savoy Declaration.

"2. A new declaration would give us the advantage of definiteness and positiveness in our doctrinal position. It would let the world know where we stand. As it is to-day, there is some doubt on that point. We have a symbol, but the symbol has not us; except, 'for the substance thereof.' Some go so far as to question whether we have a symbol at all; and many others are in doubt, or pretend to be, as to what the Congregational body is really going to propagate in the world. All this results in a loss of power. Make the symbol of the body definite, positive, Biblical, honest—one that we can stand by and know what we are defending—take it out of the ceremonies of the past, and bring it near to the hearts of the people, and you make it a power. It will then be an apologetic document for our own age as the old reformed confessions were for theirs, 'to vindicate the evangelical faith against misrepresentations and slander.'

"3. Such a new symbol would help guard the doctrinal position of the body, against two opposite dangers from within itself—against the drift toward no creed, and the drift toward nothing but a creed. What we want now is doctrinal firmness, positiveness of

Christian doctrine upon which we are all unanimous and about which, when stated, as it can be in this generation, the whole body will rally with a conscious increase of consistency and power.

"Once more, the preparation of a new symbol would inevitably give a profound impulse to the study of Biblical theology. Such has been the fact in every creed-making age. Such is the fact to-day in connection with the revision of the English translation of the Scriptures. The overhauling of old standards which are constantly going on in our theological schools, would then take place among the people at large and drive men back to fundamental principles. The agitation incident to such a movement, naturally leading to a large-minded and critical study of God's Word, could not fail to emphasize in the public mind what greatly needs emphasis in our day;—the importance of correct religious belief.

"In extremely conservative quarters it is sometimes objected that the attempt to make a new symbol would inaugurate a cutting loose from the old standards which we should be powerless to stay, and would thus tend simply to unsettle the faith of God's people. Such an objection overlooks the fact that a new declaration would not be a new departure, but supply an honest statement of the departure already made. It would not be a repudiation of our forefathers, but a noble imitation of them. Doing boldly, conscientiously for one age, what they did for theirs, is the best way to preserve their spirit. It would not be an innovation, but a renovation. It is not the 'rootless radicals' of Free Religion who either demand or would have the framing of a new declaration of faith, but the men who believe in propagating all that Jesus taught. And moreover, does it not betray a lack of confidence in the truth itself, to fear the influence of overhauling and restating the old creeds? When our Lord preached the Sermon on the Mount, He doubtless saw that there was a moiety of danger in the questioning the authority of the old teachers and traditions. It would perhaps disturb the faith of some devout minds. Those whose faith had become inseparable from the phraseology of their fathers, those who rested upon an antiquarian reverence for the old, might be set adrift.

"There is this danger in all independent investigation. But Christ never shrank from it on that account. A vague faith, an unreasoning faith, is precisely what the Saviour never taught. 'Give the mind its largest liberty,' he seems to say, cut loose from conventionalism and custom if that be necessary, but do not break away from the law and the prophets." Following his example we need not be afraid of letting down the bars for infidelity. Infidelity does not march in through an open gate of conscientious thought, but creeps in under the closed gate of unthinking prejudice or purposeless speculation.

"Now, Brethren and Fathers, it is not claimed here that any human symbol is an absolute necessity to the existence of the church. It is only held to be a practical advantage to the cause of Christian progress. The great question with God's people is always the practical one. The query which all men are discussing to-day—'What is essential to the Evangelical system?' is itself an idle question, and can never be settled, in that form. Should we not rather ask, What is essential to the highest efficiency of God's Word? What shall we preach? What is practically most efficient in sustaining and emphasizing those mighty motives of hope and fear which God urges upon men, to turn them from sin? Everything must gravitate toward that supreme inquiry at last. The matured judgment of the Christian ages must settle down upon, and abide by, whatever God thought it expedient to reveal, as the saving power for the World."

Religious News.

THERE are 2,178 Young Men's Christian Associations in the world.

A CHANNING Memorial Church is to be erected in Newport, Rhode Island.

THE General Association of Indiana met in Terre Haute on the 15th of May.

REV. J. KILPIN HIGGS, M.A., was ordained pastor of the