

GENERAL ASSEMBLY. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.

FIFTH DAY.—JUNE 18, 1876.

The Assembly met at 10 o'clock, and was constituted with prayer, after which

Principal Caven rose to make an explanation. He could not have interpreted Mr. Macdonnell's last statement differently from what he had done, but he feared Mr. Macdonnell in his remarks last night had deprived his statement of its value when it stood alone.

The Rev. J. M. King said that his interpretation of Mr. Macdonnell's statement was not changed, but he felt that that statement did not represent his brother's views as represented by himself.

Rev. Mr. Cochran moved in amendment, as follows:—"That with a view of framing a deliverance that may meet the views of the General Assembly, the motion and amendments submitted, be remitted to a committee for consideration, said committee to consist, with the mover and seconder, of all additional persons as the Moderator may appoint, with instructions to report as early as a sabbath as possible."

Rev. Mr. McMullen (Woodstock) moved, "That as it appears from Mr. Macdonnell's verbal explanation of his last statement, that his difficulty is not with the view of the Confession of Faith but with the interpretation of the Scripture, therefore resolved, that a committee be appointed to confer with Mr. Macdonnell, with a view of ascertaining the reasons of his doubts, and of giving him brotherly counsel, and report at a subsequent sederunt. He warned the Moderator that if this case be left over for a year, the fermentation which had been generated in the Church by it would grow and deepen, and would do incalculable harm.

Rev. Dr. Waters (St. John, N. B.) moved that the committee moved for by Mr. Cochran have power to confer with Mr. Macdonnell, which suggestion was agreed to by Dr. Cochran.

The Rev. Prof. McKnight (Halifax) said he believed he understood Mr. Macdonnell, but the majority of this house did not understand him. (Laughter.) Mr. Macdonnell was himself partly to blame for this misunderstanding, because of the style of language he used. A man was not to be held a heretic for mere doubt; for many men had doubts on far more fundamental questions than the present question, even on such as the existence of a God of love, and the survival of the soul over the body.

The Rev. Mr. Middlemiss thought the Assembly should observe the distinction between difficulties and doubts. He and many of them had great difficulties about the things of God; but Mr. Macdonnell decidedly had doubts. The two things were not the same. Most of them were harassed with a certain kind of doubts, but they looked upon them as temptations, and he felt when these assailed him that he could say "Get thee behind me, Satan." He had intended to move that Mr. Macdonnell repeat in their presence the ordination vow, but Prof. McLaren's motion covered that, and he supported it. He was pained by the threats of disruption which had been made, and he advised that if the Church wished to avoid disruption it should cling to its principles, be the consequences what they might.

The Rev. Dr. Ure moved in effect that the Assembly, hoping that his doubts may soon pass away, agree to accept Mr. Macdonnell's last statement, and find that no further proceedings are necessary. While regretting that this case had arisen, he did not believe that a theological crisis had arrived in the Church, as some had asserted. Taking Mr. Macdonnell for what he was, he was not the sort of a man out of whom could be manufactured a heretic (laughter), and he thought it would be a sad thing to drive him from the Church and his pulpit.

Mr. James Croil (Montreal) thought too much attention in this discussion had been paid to Mr. Macdonnell's three first statements, and too little to his last, which he believed was all they should require. He prayed that the Presbyterian platform might be broad enough to contain within its fold a man like Mr. Macdonnell.

The Rev. Mr. McLennan (Peterborough), in a different form, moved that the last statement be accepted, and spoke at great length in support of his motion. He contended that even their theological teachers held different views—at least different shades, of a view—on fundamental matters, for example on the cosmogony, the nature of the inspiration of the Scriptures, etc.

The Assembly then adjourned till three o'clock.

AFTERNOON SEDERUNT.

The Assembly resumed at three o'clock. The Rev. Principal Snodgrass (Kingston) moved to commend Mr. Macdonnell to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the hope that future study might result in the

speedy removal of his difficulties, and to proceed no further in the case. There were hardly to be found in any of their colleges two theological professors who agreed in every particular as to the sense in which the doctrine of future punishment was fundamental. He offered his resolution without the slightest fear of disruption, for he believed there was in the church a spirit of charity that would allow of a certain divergence, without the vital relationships of the truths being in the least impaired.

Professor McVicar rose with another amendment. In his judgment, Mr. Macdonnell was not in accord with the church on the doctrine in question. The first reason was because of the action of the Presbytery, and the second was because of Mr. Macdonnell's words the previous evening, which were reported in full in one of the city papers, and which were that he was not fully in accord with the church. He thought that if the Presbytery were to meet now they would not again express the hope they had done in connection with the reference. It was plain that there was a serious departure from the accepted doctrine of the Church. Serious because the whole community had been thrown into a state of great agitation; not only so but that the discussion had brought into the country a sort of literature and spread it broadcast, which was quite undesirable. People might say that it was not right to take that view of the case, but since it had had such publicity it behooved them to take that point into consideration, he would oppose anything humiliating to Mr. Macdonnell, but at the same time he wanted something done to preserve the standards of the church. (Applause.)

The Moderator requested the members of the Assembly to refrain from such demonstration.

Professor McVicar continued by stating that he was of opinion that Mr. Macdonnell had not expressed any change of belief from first to last. His impression of the belief was that Mr. Macdonnell was in a position unable to teach anything touching the great doctrine of the everlasting punishment of the wicked. He (Mr. Macdonnell) held nothing opposed to it, but he did not hold the principle to which all ministers should be willing to give their entire adhesion. He (Prof. McVicar) deprecated the method pursued by Mr. Macdonnell; he accepted all concerning his liberal feelings and the purity of his actions; but he (Mr. Macdonnell) had announced results without giving the process. If he came before the house with the Bible in his hand and told them that they were mistaken in their opinion of him, and told how he had changed his opinion, he would have been willing to accept his statement. The question was very much this—was the Assembly prepared to accept a qualified or modified subscription to the Confession from any minister? Mr. Macdonnell's subscription appeared to be a qualified one. He read the articles in the Confession on the point, and stated that there was no meagre or obscure presentation of the doctrine in the Confession of Faith or the Bible. Much had been said in the public press about progressive spirits in the church who put such great faith in the Word of God as a supreme standard; but it was not enough for a man to say that he accepted the words of Scripture; he should be able to say what meaning he attached to the words of Scripture. The question was, therefore, were they prepared to adopt the principle of qualified subscription and he answered without being narrow-minded, that he was not prepared to assent to it. Touching the question of eternal punishment he felt that no minister could hold his place as a preacher without being decided on the question. He deprecated the method of arguing that it was a sad thing that a brother should be obliged to leave his pulpit. He could tell them something sadder, and that was for him and the Moderators and others to be obliged to withdraw from the church. The motion was as follows:—"That this Assembly sustain the reference for judgment, find that in the statement made before this Assembly, Mr. Macdonnell has declared that he does not hold the doctrine of everlasting punishment in the sense held by the church and formulated in the Confession of Faith; nevertheless, that he has adopted no doctrinal views contrary to the Confession of Faith; therefore, resolved, first, that the above two-fold statement is not satisfactory to this Assembly. Second, that a Committee be appointed to confer with Mr. Macdonnell in the hope that they may be able to bring in a report as to Mr. Macdonnell's views which may be satisfactory to this Assembly."

Rev. Mr. Laing seconded the motion of Prof. McVicar. In the course of his remarks he said that after Mr. Macdonnell's statement of the previous night the door of hope was to his mind closed, but the statement which he (Mr. Macdonnell) had made that day with regard to Prof. McKnight's speech had opened it again. If Mr. Macdonnell could not agree with the Church there was a way open to him which would leave peace to himself and peace to the Church.

The Rev. Dr. Cook (Quebec) asked if there was not ground for doubt and difficulty with regard to the doctrine, that under the divine constitution men should be tormented for eternal ages. He was persuaded that it was merely because they did not consider these matters that they had no difficulties about them. He did not consider this doctrine a fundamental one, for the only ground of salvation was belief in Christ.

After remarks from the Rev. Messrs. Wilkins, Campbell of Montreal, and Sedgwick, the debate was adjourned till next morning.

EVENING SESSION.

The Assembly met at half-past seven, and was opened with devotional exercise and the reading of the minutes.

HEARING THE DELEGATES.

The credentials of Rev. Alex. Somerville, delegate from the Free Church of Scotland, and of Rev. Dr. S. A. Mutchmore, from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, were read.

Rev. Dr. Cochran introduced the dele-

gates. In the course of his remarks he referred to the uniform interest taken in the Canadian Home Missions by the Free Church of Scotland. Rev. Mr. Somerville was introduced as one of the disruption worthies. Great interest was taken in his work in Canada, and he (Dr. Cochran) was perfectly sure that the honest hearts and congregations of this country would be open to Mr. Somerville wherever he should happen to go. Dr. Mutchmore was introduced as the editor of the Philadelphia Presbyterian, besides being the pastor of a large and increasing congregation. Of him he could say that whatever high expectations they might have entertained with regard to the American delegate, he would give them much more than they expected.

Rev. Mr. Somerville said he had been commissioned to come all this distance to congratulate the Assembly on the happy union which had lately taken place. He felt it better to abstain from referring to the state of religious parties at home, lest he might say anything which might jar with any who were present, or any whom he left behind. But he would say that from all hands he had found that there was approbation felt and expressed with regard to the Union of Churches which had taken place in Canada, and more, that the basis of that union was highly approved of. He left his own General Assembly immediately on the completion of the union between the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Free Church. He came away with a picture figured on the tablet of his heart in tints more glowing than a photographer could supply. After the formalities proper had taken place in the two Churches the hour arrived, and the doors of the large hall being opened, the brethren of the Reformed Presbyterian Church came in. They passed through the dense crowd; the house filled from door to ceiling, and as they entered and reached the place for them there was maintained a profound silence. No sooner had they occupied the place allotted to them than a ringing cry pierced from bench to bench of the building; the voice of thanksgiving ascended, and congratulation was offered. A German poet had pictured what he called a dark desert. He first represented an earthquake, then a stillness, then a sudden rising from a dim light of countless shadows, and then a great multitude appeared in the pale moonlight and swept majestically by for the few hours of their shadowy resurrection lives. When they saw the seventy file into the church they seemed to see the shadows of the past. It was a thrilling moment never to be forgotten—the union which argued so well for Scotland; a great wave of blessing had been passing over the British Isles, and it was pleasant to say that decided tokens of the blessings remained with them in Dublin, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and elsewhere. A very wonderful work was going on all over the country, and it was very gratifying to be able to say that it had been produced by friends from across the Atlantic. They had done a great deal to cement the union between Great Britain and America—a union which he hoped, as time advanced, would become stronger and more lasting in its results. It was felt that there had been a vitalization under the movement that had been going on among them. If the churches were not vitalized they would not be very powerful in their influence on the dead man around them. It was Christ and the cross which vitalized, and if the Cross were taken away a collapse would take place in the spiritual firmament and all hope would be gone. He would like to transfer the Assembly to the shores of one of the great Scottish lakes, and there point out the beauties of the scene. It was not the charm of the scene, but it was the water power of the great rivers that had to be taken into account. The water power he then likened to the power the ministers could wield with the help of the Gospel, and added that the reason for this was that if they took hold of Christ they took hold of an ocean. Another thing of vital importance was the power of sympathy with one another. In those days people were most likely to forget the power of sympathy. With it a man was strong; without it he was comparatively weak. If the minister were supported by the sympathy of his people, he would be able to perform about ten times the work he could do before. They were therefore to get sympathy to enable them to go hand in hand together. There was, a short time ago, in his country, a number of people who had an extraordinary passion for swimming long distances. (Laughter.) What was it that carried these people through? He believed that if they had been left to swim without anyone caring for them they would have sunk midway. It was the consciousness that people were sympathizing with them that carried them through. They were to remember always the words of Christ, "Be of good cheer," and take up the words of good cheer. The good cheer was to be taken up from lip to lip, from heart to heart, from hand to hand, eastward to Newfoundland, westward to Manitoba, and northward to the Esquimaux, and by it they would lift the world and conquer the earth. Another point he wished to touch on was the importance of unity. There was no one thing of more importance than that in all the denominations of the Church. (Hear, hear.) In conclusion, he alluded to the work of the Holy Spirit, for the assistance of which he urged his hearers to pray earnestly.

Rev. Dr. Mutchmore said that for a long time it had been his desire to cross that silver thread which separated the United States from Canada, in order that he might be able to see what was on the other side. He had crossed it once before and had only seen some very respectable mummies in a museum, (laughter), but now he had come where there were no mummies and evidently, judging from the learning, eloquence, etc., displayed no dummies either. He had had the pleasure of attending the Assemblies of the Church in Scotland and Ireland, a few years ago, and the speaking at either of them was not equal to what he had heard in this Canadian Assembly. When he thought of the blessings which had come to the united Church in the United States his heart gushed forth thankfulness to God that he could congratulate

the Church in Canada upon being now united. (Applause.) That union was a triumph not only for earthly but also for heavenly rejoicing, and even the Lord Jesus might smile complacently upon it, because His prayer before leaving the earth was that His Church might be one. They would find that just in proportion as they were united they would be able to resist more and more the power of Satan and his wiles. Condensation made a Niagara of that which would otherwise be only a placid stream. Some of the people in the United States Church had thought that when they obtained union they would have uniformity, but they had learned better sense since. Shortly after their union took place Prof. Swing broke forth like a skyrocket as if he would flit with the comets; but the effect of that had only been similar to that of a mustard plaster, and a counter irritant was an excellent thing sometimes. (Laughter.) During the past year 50,000 persons had been added to the Presbyterian Church in the United States. (Applause.) Charles V., after abdicating, had learned when making clocks that he could not get two of them to tick together, and from that circumstance was convinced, when too late, that the great mistake of his life had been his attempting to get all his provinces to tick together. Their sister in the United States rejoiced that they held to their old standards which they believed embodied the truth of the Gospel; and which were a bulwark against superstition on the one side and against wretched latitudinarianism on the other. (Applause.) He rejoiced, too, that those standards had the hold of them, as he had seen, during the last two days, that they had. (Applause.) In alluding to the importance of missionary effort, he remarked that the only difference between the diamond that glitters in the crown of our Queen, and that which the discoverer picks out of the mud, was that the one was washed and polished and the other was not. And so the only difference between the Christian and the poor wretch who was not saved was that one was washed and polished and the other was not. In Egypt the wealth of a man was counted by the number of acres he could irrigate; and so the wealth of Christian was to be calculated by the number of acres of desert over which they could spread the Gospel. It was said that charity began at home, but he denied that charity stayed at home—she was a gad-about, (Applause.)

The Moderator said he had great pleasure in conveying to the delegates, on behalf of the Assembly, their cordial thanks for the admirable, eloquent, and interesting addresses which they had delivered. The Canadian Church heartily reciprocated the friendly greetings of the Churches which they represented. The sederunt then adjourned until next morning at ten o'clock, after the Assembly had sung the Psalm beginning

"Behold how good a thing it is, And how becoming well Together such as brethren are, In unity to dwell."

and the Moderator had pronounced the benediction.

SIXTH DAY.

MORNING SEDERUNT—JUNE 14th.

This morning's sederunt was opened at ten o'clock with prayer. After the minutes had been read,

The Rev. Mr. Sedgwick, who had the floor when the discussion ceased yesterday afternoon, continued his speech, and moved that the Assembly allow the matter to drop in the meantime, in the hope that after consideration and study, Mr. Macdonnell might be able to bring his views into harmony with those of the Church.

The Rev. Dr. Murray, of P. E. Island, seconded the motion and spoke at some length. At the conclusion of his remarks, The Rev. Mr. Black, of Montreal, attempted to move for the previous question, but his motion was not entertained.

The Rev. Professor McKerran took strong ground in favour of Mr. Macdonnell, and was followed by

Rev. Mr. Thompson (West River, N.S.), contended that it was important that the standards of the Church should be adhered to. These need not trammel anyone's conscience; if a minister of the Presbyterian Church could not preach the doctrines of it he was at liberty to leave it. (Subdued applause.) Various members of the Assembly had endeavoured to analyze Mr. Macdonnell's statements in order to ascertain his real views, and a great deal had been said as to his (Mr. Macdonnell) splendid talents; he (Mr. Thompson) held that if Mr. Macdonnell had such fine talents he was the best exponent of his own views. Mr. Macdonnell had had plenty of time to reconsider the views he expressed in his sermon, and he had told them the other night that he had not changed them.

Rev. Prof. McKerran said that that was not what Mr. Macdonnell had said.

Mr. Thompson said he understood him to say so.

Mr. Thompson said Mr. Macdonnell had stated that his views were contrary to those of the Church.

Mr. Macdonnell—I have never stated that I held views contrary to the teaching of the Church. (Cheers.) I have stated that I held no view on this point contrary to the teaching of the Church. (Applause.)

Mr. Thompson—Does he hold the views of the Church?

Mr. Macdonnell—That's another point; I was correcting a mis-statement of my speech.

Prof. McKerran rose to a point of order; he objected to any speaker getting up and firing questions at Mr. Macdonnell.

Mr. Thompson said the fact was Mr. Macdonnell did not hold the views of the Church, and he asked whether it was right that a minister could take the same stand on other doctrines. They would have men preaching in the Church who were not in full accord, and the Assembly would be sanctioning that proceeding. The position of the Church was far more important than the position of Mr. Macdonnell, and however tenderly they might deal with him—and if he had been an inferior member of the Church he would not have been dealt with so tenderly—(oh! oh!)—they could not tolerate it. When he looked to the harm the sermon had done he could not

help saying that his people would not be pleased with the Church if the Assembly allowed any such action to pass. His idea of the Church was that it was to be so broad as to take in all the truths of God's Word, and so narrow that it would exclude every known error. They could not admit any error in the Church; it would never do. He did not think that Mr. Macdonnell could refuse to confer with a committee on a matter of so much importance, as the interchange of feeling would be a great relief to his mind. He hoped Mr. Macdonnell would acknowledge freely that he had difficulties, and that when they were of such a nature as to injure the public mind. He therefore approved of the appointment of a committee to confer in a Christian manner with Mr. Macdonnell. The interest and character of the General Assembly was at stake, and, however much they might respect Mr. Macdonnell, they should look first at the interests of the Church.

Rev. Mr. Whimster felt that the duty of the Church was to be valiant for the truth, love one another, and bear one another's burdens. He proposed a long motion to the effect that the matter be referred to a committee, that further proceedings be postponed for a year, and that Mr. Macdonnell be required to define his position regarding the doctrine of future punishment to the Assembly at its next meeting.

Rev. Mr. Chiniquy seconded the motion. The Rev. Professor Mowat, of Queen's College, Kingston, made a vigorous appeal on behalf of the retention of Mr. Macdonnell. He greatly blamed the Presbytery of Toronto for the notoriety of this matter, inasmuch as they had the opportunity of settling it at their first meeting by simply admonishing Mr. Macdonnell for the sermon he preached. When a man who was both very good and very able was the one concerned, Prof. Mowat thought the Assembly ought to hesitate before expelling him.

The Rev. Mr. Dickie, of Berlin, advocated moderation. In the course of his remarks he protested against personal arguments which had been brought into the discussion.

After a brief speech by the Rev. Jas. Bennett, of St. John, N. B.,

The Rev. John Smith, of Bay-st. Church, counselled the utmost freedom of speech in discussing the matter, even though it might take a week to come to a finding. He contended that the acceptance of Mr. Macdonnell's statement would be equivalent to allowing of a qualified subscription to the Confession of Faith, and he thought the hanging up of the case for a year would indicate to the country that the Assembly itself had doubts on this important question.

After a short speech by the Rev. Mr. McLean, of Belleville, the Assembly adjourned for recess, it being one o'clock.

AFTERNOON SEDERUNT—THE MACDONNELL CASE.

The Assembly met again at three o'clock. Rev. Mr. Inglis (Ayr) said he had heard a great many very philosophical speeches, but he asked those who had made them to recollect that the Assembly was not a body of philosophers. (Laughter.) There had been too much hair-splitting. There had been a tone introduced into the debate which he had at first not been inclined to occupy. When one man came into opposition to an Assembly like that, he thought it no small thing; and if it came to one of the parties being obliged to bend he thought it should not be the Assembly. He favoured allowing the matter to stand over until next year.

Rev. Mr. McGillivray thought they were drifting away from the point to which they ought to be steering. Mr. Macdonnell had said he regretted what he had said in that sermon; he had said he did not hold any view contrary to the Church, but that he had some difficulty. Was that Assembly going to say that a man must not be allowed to have a difficulty? Was it not going to allow a man to have a conscience of his own? If not, let it say at once it was inflexible—let it say it was the Pope of Rome. (Oh!) Mr. Macdonnell adhered to the Confession, he said. He had no view contrary to it, whatever; he simply had some difficulty because he had a mind. Besides, he (Mr. Macdonnell) had said he would not teach anything contrary to the doctrine of the Confession on this point.

Rev. J. M. King found it impossible to sit in the Court and hear the situation laid down in the way in which the previous speaker had laid it down. The situation really was that Mr. Macdonnell had not come to a doctrine at variance with the Church, but he was unable to hold the doctrine of the Church in the sense that the Church holds it. Mr. Macdonnell could take the words of the Confession, but he was not settled whether those words, which were taken from the Scripture, bore the meaning which the Church put upon it. He (Mr. King), after reading all the statements, was still a little perplexed as to Mr. Macdonnell's attitude. Mr. McKnight had placed his position at the time of the preaching of the sermon as one of suspense, and it was a question whether he had receded from that attitude. Mr. Macdonnell could not honestly accept the doctrine of the Confession, and the question was whether on that doctrine or all doctrines a minister could preach in the Canada Presbyterian Church, while holding views differing from the doctrines accepted by the Church. If they legitimized that portion, it would be binding for all time, and the Church would be placed on a new foundation altogether. While sympathizing with and appreciating Prof. Mowat's remarks, he was obliged to say that by simply censuring Mr. Macdonnell the proper end would not have been reached. He wanted to know if any Presbyterian Church had a minister in the Court who did not agree with the doctrines of the Church with whom they would condone. He thought not, and he was not prepared that the Assembly should inaugurate such a proceeding. To his mind the question was not that the doctrine was a fundamental doctrine, but that at this time on this continent, and in this city, every minister should be in a position to preach a doctrine of such vital importance, more particularly as error was creeping in in that particular form. And permitting a minister