

UNDENOMINATIONALISM.

The Bishop of Chester has replied as follows to an invitation extended to him by the Rev. J. C. Sowerbutts, Wesleyan minister, of Heaton Chapel, near Stockport, to preside over a conference of an undenominational character on mission work:—

“The Palace, Chester, Nov. 6, '91.—Rev. and Dear Sir. It is with sincere regret that I am compelled to decline the invitation with which you have honoured me to preside over the foreign missionary conference to be held at the Wesleyan chapel, Heaton Chapel, near Stockport. I need hardly say that I revere and almost envy the missionary devotion and enterprise of the various Nonconformist bodies, but I am deeply convinced that any solid step towards reunion is impossible on the basis of that euphemistically termed undenominationalism which is, I observe, adopted in your programme. I regard this undenominationalism, which is at present the one State-paid religion in the country, as the great imposture of our day, the offspring of an unhallowed alliance between bad logic and worse theology, the youngest pretender to religious supremacy, the smooth-faced minion of a designing secularism. At Stockport just now, in the notorious case of the industrial school, it is revealing itself in its true character as the patron of religious intolerance and bigotry. With the stupendous exception of the Roman Catholic claim there is, perhaps no more formidable obstacle to the reunion of Christendom than this Frankenstein evoked by our ecclesiastical-political empiricism. Nor is it easy to see how missionary zeal can long survive the influence of a system which slowly, perhaps, but surely, takes all the color out of religious belief. But the undenominational character of the conference is not my only difficulty. The circular you were good enough to send me seems to assume what has been aptly termed the theory of ‘polychurchian.’ From this, too, I must respectfully, but firmly stand aloof. I cannot believe that the problems which vex us are to be solved by substituting for the ancient idea of one Holy Catholic Church the novel conception of a practically unlimited aggregation of perpetually sub-dividing religious organizations. This is, indeed, to propose an ‘*cirenicon*’ by the corruption of a world and an idea. In conclusion, let me again assure you of my genuine and enthusiastic respect for