

BAPTIST UNION.

Historical Work of the Convention Committee.

BY G. O. GATES, ST JOHN.

Mr. President, Brothers and Sisters of the United Baptist Churches and sympathizing Friends, permit me to preface my remarks at this time with a word or two:

This is surely an occasion for praise and thanksgiving. We have come to a period in our ecclesiastical history, toward which many of our most loved and loyal workers—years since by death parted from us—looked with hope and for which they prayed. This Baptist union which we meet here this evening to declare, was more than a fancy—a dream, in the mind and soul of many of the members of our Baptist and Free Baptist churches of the last generation. Many of those Godly ones deplored the fact, that with practically the same doctrinal teaching we were two denominations instead of one. They talked of union, they prayed for union, and many of them labored earnestly looking toward its realization, and though compelled to pass on without hailing its inception—God reserving this grand experience for us—still it is but just that we now acknowledge but for their efforts we should not tonight be here celebrating this epochal event in the history of the Maritime Baptists. Let us not in our joy forget "others have labored and ye are entered into their labor." While we now rejoice in what, after years of thoughtful consideration has been accomplished, and some feel the cup of joy is filled to the brim, let us rejoice too, that we can believe, that many to whom in life this union of the two Baptist denominations was of vital moment and dear to their heart, are in the immediate presence and glory of their Lord rejoicing with us, and perchance, with a joy more profound than ours because they may see from the blessed heights now theirs farther on into that abyssal future than is possible to us.

Tonight "They sing His praise in Hymns above, And we in Hymns below."

I wish in order that we may have our minds refreshed in regard to this matter of the union of the Baptists and Free Baptist of New Brunswick, to trace briefly, as gleaned from our Convention records, the history of the movement during the past 21 years. It was at the Convention held in Moncton, 1884, 21 years ago, a letter was read by the Secretary from the late Dr. Bill relating to union with the Free Baptists. On motion it was resolved to refer this letter to a committee of five, viz.: Revs. Drs. Hopper and Saunders, Bro. J. March, Revs. I. J. Skimmer and S. B. Kempton. Later in the meetings this committee reported. They recommended the following resolution:

Resolved, That a judicious committee be appointed by this body to meet with the approaching Free Baptist Conference, to enquire what co-operation, if any, may be practicable in Foreign Mission work. After discussion this report was adopted. The committee appointed was composed of the following: Revs. Dr. Bill, Dr. Hopper, S. B. Kempton, J. E. Goucher, J. F. Bartlett, D. G. McDonald, C. Goodspeed.

The Convention of 1885 met at Amherst. The above mentioned committee reported as follows: "Your committee met with the Free Christian Baptist Conference in Fredericton and were most fraternally received. The desire of our Convention was fully set forth by different members of the committee. The Conference appointed a committee to confer with us. The result of the deliberation of this joint committee showed that the Free Christian Baptist brethren were more inclined to consider the question of a complete organic union than of union simply in Foreign Missions. Your committee not being empowered to treat with them on this question, further deliberation was had of an informal character on the general question of Union which showed that many advantages would flow from such a Union if it could be effected without compromise of truth.

While your Committee parted with the Free Christian Baptists without arriving at any definite results so far as union in Foreign Mission work is concerned, yet they have to report a most cordial greeting given them by that body and the expression of a desire on their part to consider the broader question of an organic union of both denominations. Under these favoring circumstances your committee would respectfully suggest the passage of the following resolutions: 1st, Resolved, that we highly appreciate all desires on the part of our Free Baptist brethren for union and co-operation with us in the work and service of God, and we would therefore affectionately recommend our ministers, churches, quarterly meetings and Associations to pursue such a line of thought, feeling and action towards our Free Baptist brethren as may tend with the Divine blessing to secure a general union of the two bodies. 2nd, Resolved, that a committee be appointed to take our fraternal greetings to the Annual Conference of our Free Christian brethren and to assure them that we ardently pray that the time may speedily come when Baptists and Free Christian Baptists shall see eye to eye, speak the same thing and be perfectly joined together in the same judgment, and when they shall cordially unite as one Gospel phalanx "to contend earnestly for the

faith once delivered to the saints." This report was adopted and the following as the committee asked for were appointed: Revs. Dr. Bill, Dr. Hopper, J. E. Goucher, S. Walton, D. G. McDonald, C. Goodspeed, H. Foshay, A. Cahoon, P. R. Foster, H. N. Parry.

In 1886 the Convention met in Brussels Street, St. John. To this meeting the Free Baptist Conference sent a delegation which was introduced and three of their number made brief addresses, viz.: Revs. G. A. Hartley, A. Taylor, and J. Noble. Then Rev. Mr. Hartley, representing the delegation read from the records the action of the Free Baptist Conference, as follows: That we highly appreciate all desires on the part of our Baptist brethren for union and co-operation with us in the work and service of God, and would therefore affectionately recommend our Ministers, Churches, District Meetings and Conferences to pursue such a line of thought, feeling and action towards our Baptist brethren as may tend by Divine blessing, to secure a general union of the two bodies.

That a delegation be appointed to convey the fraternal greetings of this Conference to the next session of the Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces, and to assure them that we ardently pray that the time may speedily come when the Baptists and Free Baptists of this country shall see eye to eye, speak the same thing, and be perfectly joined together in the same judgment, and when they shall cordially unite as one to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. That the delegation be instructed to say to our Baptist brethren that, if they think it desirable, this Conference is prepared to appoint its part of a joint Committee to canvass the whole question, and, if possible, suggest a general basis of union of the respective bodies."

It was then moved by Dr. Bill and seconded by Rev. Dr. Higgins that a committee be appointed to confer with the Free Baptist brethren with a view to organic union, and that the committee of nominations be instructed to nominate such said Committee.

Later in the session the following were named as the Committee to confer with the Free Baptists with a view to organic union, viz.: Revs. Dr. Bill, Dr. Hopper, Dr. T. A. Higgins, Dr. Sawyer, A. Cahoon, C. Goodspeed, W. H. Richan, W. J. Stewart, S. B. Kempton, and Bro. J. March and J. H. Harding. Alternates Revs. D. A. Steele, F. D. Crawley, J. A. Gordon and G. O. Gates.

In 1887 the Convention met in Charlottetown, P. E. I. The Committee appointed to confer with the Free Baptists with a view to organic union reported and presented a basis of union which after much discussion and some amendments was passed and adopted as a whole.

From the report which was quite lengthy I take the following:

"That the union sentiment as it relates to the different sections of the Baptist family in these Provinces has been deepening and widening from its inception until the present hour. All the interchanges of thought and sympathy by deputations and otherwise, and all the discussions which have taken place, have tended to extend and strengthen the desire for union. Obstacles which to some minds seemed insurmountable at first, have disappeared, and the pathway to organic union is beginning to shine as with the brightness of a sunbeam."

The report says that the Committee of the Convention met with the Free Baptist Conference at their anniversary. A cordial reception was given and the following action taken on the part of the Conference, as presented by a report submitted by Dr. Musgrove, viz., Your Committee appointed to consider the official letter from the Secretary of the Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces, held in St. John, N. B., August last, beg leave to submit the following report:

1st.—That this Conference heartily receive the communication, and cordially welcome the delegates from the Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces.

2nd.—That we have heard with pleasure the desire of the Convention for union of the Baptist and Free Christian Baptists of the Maritime Provinces, and heartily reciprocate the desire for union, and we shall rejoice if it be the will of God that such union be consummated.

3rd.—As an earnest of our desire we comply with the request of our brethren for a conference on the subject by appointing the following members of Conference a committee to meet the delegation from the Baptist Convention, who are requested to form a joint committee, and if possible, draft a basis of union that shall satisfy the respective bodies: Revs. A. Taylor, G. A. Hartley, J. McLeod, D. D., W. Downey, G. W. McDonald, J. Perry, F. Babcock, J. Noble, Bro. J. A. Vanwart, T. W. Musgrove, W. Peters, D. McL. Vince.

We also recommend that Revs. S. N. Royal and E. Crowell, of the N. S. Free Baptist Conference be requested to meet with the joint committee and aid in the work of the said committee, in expectation that if the union should be effected the Free Baptists of Nova Scotia may also be united with us."

The day following this, October 13, the joint committee met in the vestry of the Germain Street

church. The report says: "All deeply felt the grave responsibility of the work in hand, and some time was spent in united and fervent supplication for Divine guidance. Two anxious days were spent in needful investigations, intermingled with earnest entreaties at the throne of heavenly grace. Then came as deliverance what is now known as "the basis of union," in seventeen (17) sections, and four (4) articles on Church polity.

The Committee having gone thus far felt it wise to submit their decision to a larger representative meeting for review and critical consideration. Accordingly they called a special meeting of the Educational and Missionary Boards of the two denominations represented and all other brethren who might be disposed to attend. This meeting took place in the Germain street church on November 17, 1886. It was attended by 21 Baptist ministers and 16 laymen, by the Free Baptists, 26 ministers and 20 laymen, in all 83. At this meeting the basis was carefully reviewed clause by clause, criticisms offered and explanations given. The most perfect freedom in expression was exercised, and all seemed inspired with a spirit of genuine fidelity and brotherly love. After prolonged discussion the basis was most cordially endorsed.

The Messenger and Visitor reporting the meeting said "there were only two of the proposed articles of faith upon which there was difference of opinion. The first of these was that upon 'final perseverance, passed with but three dissenting, and the one on the Lord's Supper which was passed with two dissentients, one of each denomination."

The adoption by the Convention of the report was followed by the following resolution; viz., that the Committee on Union with the Free Christian Baptists be continued, with the addition of Dr. Saunders, to communicate the action of this Convention to that body, and to further prosecute the work of union.

The Convention of 1888 was held in the Assembly hall of Acadia University. In the absence of Dr. Bill the chairman of the Committee on Union, Rev. A. Cahoon read the report.

"Your Committee on Baptist Union beg leave to report: That they met with the Free Baptist Conference in Midland in November last, and were received in the spirit of genuine brotherly love.

The discussion on Baptist Union called forth so many strong expressions from the leading brethren of the Conference in favor of union on the basis, as endorsed by our Convention, that your Committee felt that the consummation of organic union was only a question of time. But by the following record which we take from the year book of the Conference, it will be seen, our brethren want more time for deliberation before they decide definitely. Their reason was fully understood and appreciated by your Committee."

I make a few extracts from the report. This was the action taken by the Conference. "Whereas, we regard it important, 1st, That our churches should be more fully informed as to what is involved in the proposed union of the Baptist bodies of the Maritime Provinces; and 2nd, That in whatever steps are taken towards such union the Free Baptists of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick should act together. Therefore resolved, That while we regard a union, which will involve no sacrifice of principle, and which would increase the strength and efficiency of the great Baptist brotherhood, as most desirable, we think it better to defer further action, and commend the subject to all our people as one that should have their earnest thought and prayers. They further resolved, That a Committee be appointed to have in charge the question of Baptist Union." The Convention Committee suggested the appointment of a committee as usual, to act in conjunction with the committee of Conference, in suggesting such measures as may seem to them necessary to carry into effect fully the expressed wish of those concerned.

This request of the Committee was complied with by the Convention and the same brethren were appointed with Rev. E. J. Grant in the place of Dr. Hopper removed. I think it well here to refer to a communication sent the Convention by the Conference Committee under date of August 20, 1888. In it they say that the Basis of Union was before our Conference and was freely discussed. While there were, as was expected there would be differences of opinion as to the exact meaning of some sections, it was in the main warmly approved. Though many brethren were of the opinion that if a vote had been taken the basis would have been adopted, it was thought better not to press it to a vote so long as there appeared a probability that for any reason there would be a considerable minority not satisfied with any material portion of it. Fuller information, and—perhaps, some possible verbal changes would, it was believed, make it more generally satisfactory. Hence the resolution deferring further action. We believe we are expressing the very general feeling of the denomination when we say that we think the union of the several bodies in the Maritime Provinces is most desirable; and we trust that whether on the basis framed by the joint committee or a modification of it, or an entirely new one, the time is not far distant when there shall be organic union of the bodies already one in heart and so nearly alike in their teaching of Scrip-

ture tru We shall appointe union a decisive The this me Confer welcome address, of the C The C Goodspe that, in ren are of Union two bodi union be mittee be it shall committe point, h fellowship union. This re appointe Bill, A. A Steel W. J. S Gordon, Harding, In 1890 Committe the fact two bodi ther said not yet a Union Co the respo them. The mittee be The rep appointe Bro. Fosh The Con meeting o solved the timed an ley take t The Con solved to for this y nearly the The Con this meeti ed. Then more, or b made in o brethren i sight of th Confie pastor Conference prayed the again in th Convention Nor were unanswered ster Street brethren, D brought th most earne that the un ies which v might be b Conventio move in th the followin Whereas w ing feeling tions for th Baptists of a Committe pointed to pointed by that Baptist union upon upon by a ratified by t Provinces at further resol of these com mittee of the tion taken. vention next the Committe and H. F. A This Comm the close of their report we take the for the Con that we wer problem of u Hughes and in the deli complied with given us the makes mentio with the Con It says, "I