

The Canadian Independent.

"ONE IS YOUR MASTER, EVEN CHRIST, AND ALL YE ARE BRETHREN."

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UNION NUMBER.

THE ANNUAL CONVOCATION.

Pleasant Gathering in the Limestone City.

WHAT THE BRETHREN DISCUSSED, AND WHAT PLANS THEY LAID.

(By Our Own Reporter.)

The annual meeting of the ministers and delegates of the Canadian Congregational churches is always looked forward to with bright anticipations. These were not at all disappointed this year at Kingston. We have seen a larger attendance of the brethren, the Ontario elections somewhat interfering with the attendance, especially of delegates. But those who were present greatly enjoyed themselves, both in the noble generosity of the friends who entertained the visitors and in the themes which were brought forward treating of denominational life and advancement. It was a great pleasure to all to welcome the Rev. Dr. Wilkes, and especially as there was some fear that he would not be able to attend. His bright countenance and loving counsel were never more welcome than at our late assembly.

We have much pleasure in furnishing our friends with a bird's-eye view of the entire meeting, only regretting that our limited space will not permit us to give the facts at greater length. We trust the report will be carefully read, and that quickened zeal and intenser work for the Master will grow out of the perusal.

WEDNESDAY.

The first session of the Union was held on Wednesday evening, when the opening sermon was preached by the Rev. W. H. Allworth, of Paris. The text selected was John xvi. 12-13. The theme was "Progressive Christianity." The preacher carefully handled his subject, claiming throughout his whole effort that there has been continual development in Christian truth. God has wrought with man on the ground of development. He has proceeded from the partial revelation of Himself in early days to the full enunciation of His character in Jesus Christ. He has gone on from the dispensation of the Book to the dispensation of the Spirit. Truth *per se* has not grown, but the human power of interpreting it has grown. The Scriptures abound in seminal ideas. Even Christ did not reveal all, but left much to the coming Spirit. The Spirit must unfold the Book. Creeds have hindered men from seeing the light in the light of God. Men have no warrant in saying that all light on truth should cease in 1643 A.D. Many stick fast just where the Westminster Confession left them. The apostles left no claim on record to finality. The Bible is far better understood than ever it was before. These were the sentiments enunciated by the preacher in a clear and logical manner.

The Rev. J. I. Hindley, M.A., was elected Minute-Secretary, and the Rev. A. F. McGregor, B.A., of Listowell, Assistant-Secretary.

The session closed with prayer.

THURSDAY.

Among the most delightful meetings of the Union is the morning prayer-meeting. The devotional exercises this morning were led by Rev. J. B. Silcox. Special prayer was offered for a mission work.

The Union was denied the usual address of the retiring chairman, as the Rev. R. K. Black was unable to be present. This was felt to be a serious loss.

The election of a new chairman was proceeded with, and resulted in the unanimous and enthusiastic choice of the Rev. J. F. Stevenson, LL.B., of Montreal. The Chairman was conducted to his seat amid applause, and it was declared "the first election in Ontario for the 5th of June."

Upon the roll being called, the following persons were found to be in attendance:

MINISTERS.—W. H. Allworth, John Brown, R. Brown, H. J. Colwell, G. Cornish, LL.D., B. W. Day, C. Duff, M.A., Prof. K. M. Fenwick, J. L. Foster, J. Griffith, R. Hay, J. I. Hindley, M.A., J. Howell, E. Ireland, S. N. Jackson, D. Macallum, E. C. W. McColl, R. Mackay, W. Manchee, J. McKillican, W. McIntosh, J. F. Malcolm, W. M. Peacock, H. Peasley, B.A., H. D. Powis, G. Purkiss, J. Salmon, B.A., J. G. Sanderson, E. D. Silcox, J. B. Silcox, W. W. Smith, J. I. Stevenson, LL.B., J. Unsworth, R. W. Wallace, M.A., B.D., W. H. Warriner, B.A., H. Wilkes, D.D., LL.D., and J. Wood.

DELEGATES.—J. McDougall, Athol; Robert Eggleston, Cold Springs; A. Hodge, Eaton; S. Hodgskin, Guelph; J. Bale, Hamilton; G. Robertson and J. H. McFarlane, Kingston; Mrs. J. Brown, Lanark; Peter Christie, Martintown; R. McLachlan, Montreal (Calvary); T. Smith, Newmarket; F. Moodie, Ottawa; J. B. Saer, Owen Sound; Don. Finlayson, Paris; W. B. Young, Quebec; R. Robertson and G. Bishopric, St. Catharines; W. C. Ashdown, Toronto (Zion); Thomas Parker, Yorkville.

The make-up of the Union undergoes some alteration each year from various causes. This year the changes were the subjoined.

Three aged and honoured brethren have passed away to their heavenly reward: the Rev. Joseph Wheeler of Albion, the Rev. Hiram Denny of Erin, and the Rev. John Durrant of Stratford. The mention of fallen standard-bearers is always deeply affecting, but the cross is exchanged for the crown, the conflict for the rest.

The following brethren were granted letters of dismissal: Rev. Albert Van Camp, to the State of New York; Rev. Edwin Rose, to Nova Scotia; and, the names of Revs. J. A. R. Dickson and T. M. Reikie were dropped from the roll.

The following persons were received as members of the Union:

Rev. A. F. McGregor, B.A.

" W. Ewing, B.A.

" A. McFadyen, B.A.

Bethel Congregational Church, Kingston, was also received into the fellowship of the Union.

The Rev. Mr. Cuthbertson, D. McKinnon and F. Wrigley were proposed for membership, and—according to the standing rule concerning admission—await reception one year hence.

The Rev. James Roy, of Wesley Congregational Church, Montreal, being present, was asked to sit as a corresponding member. And the students of the Congregational College were admitted to the same privilege.

The Committee appointed a year since to confer with Bond street Church, Toronto, reported that as that church respectfully declined such a conference, its name should be dropped from the Union roll. The report was adopted.

The Rev. Dr. Wilkes read to the Assembly the following valuable paper, on the topic of "What are the essential elements of unity in denominational fellowship and action?"

Fellowship and co-operation commend themselves at once to our calmest judgment and our best feelings. Man was not created to live and act alone. Our mightiest and purest instincts demand association with others; and that association requires fellowship and co-operation. Fellowship is mainly a matter belonging to our moral nature. It is awakened by mutual sympathy, and manifested by associate action. It is a communion of interests and of purposes. We compare notes with our friend; we consider his experience, whether painful or pleasant, as in some sort our own, by our sympathy, rejoicing when he rejoices, sorrowing when he is sad. The true Christian loves God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and doing so enters into a living sympathy with their works and methods of providential procedure. The Saviour partly defined it when he said, "If ye loved Me ye would rejoice because I said I go to the Father: for My Father is greater than I." Their love would be expressed in holy sympathy with His exaltation to the Father's right hand to share in the blessedness and glory of carrying into effect the "Great Salvation." In like manner the genuine believer loves the Christian brotherhood, and, doing so, exercises practical sympathy in all that is of interest to that brotherhood. "They that fear the Lord speak often one to another;" they seek each other's welfare; they are partakers of a common salvation, and have a mutual interest in its honour and efficiency.

Now it is plainly not at all needful to this fellowship whether of the individual soul with the Father and the Son, or

of Christian believers one with the other, that there should be precise agreement in views of truth or in modes of action. It may be doubted if any two disciples of the Master form precisely the same estimate of any given truth, for even if they unite in the use of the same words, the conceptions which those words express differ in the two cases; and then neither of them may be in exact harmony with His estimate, who is the God of Truth. Certainly there can be, and there is, true Christian fellowship among the servants of Christ who have great diversities of conceptions and of estimates of truth. If this were not so, as it seems to me, there could be no fellowship at all. In both references just made the fellowship is based upon love; love of God and love of the brotherhood; a love, however, which supposes a common basis of faith, and which could have no possible existence apart from resting on certain great fundamental facts and truths revealed to us of the Father through the Son. Hence, let me say in passing, I see not how we can rid ourselves of the distinction between facts and truths that are essential, and those which are non-essential, or how we can in every instance define precisely for others the line between the two. At the same time it is manifest that such line must be drawn somewhere, and it is not intolerance nor is it bigotry to draw it where there is a general agreement of the Christian judgment and consciousness, and to restrict our denominational fellowship within that line. We do not deal unkindly or uncharitably with those without that line, but simply decline fellowship with them in matters where there is such fundamental disagreement.

Denominational fellowship and co-operation must be conditioned on the distinctive characteristics of the denomination. In our case there are no rigid connectional relations between the churches as in Methodism and Presbyterianism; if there were we should have to inquire into their nature in order to get at the essential elements of unity; but, on the contrary, our churches are based on the principle of completeness with themselves and entire independence as to authority, the one of the other. We hold association to be next in importance to independence; it is a matter not of choice merely but of duty to the Master and to the brethren; but it is association without aught of lordship or authority, it is a combining in mutual interest and affection for co-operative action of self-contained and free churches, every one of which calls none but Christ "Master" and "Lord." It follows that the nature of the fellowship and of the co-working in this case is substantially the same as in those of Christians towards the Father and the Son, and towards one another individually. It is mainly the same thing in its application to society which has been hinted at in its application to the individual disciple. There must be *love*, in order to which there must be confidence in the genuineness of character, and there must be a going forth of this love in practical sympathy and helpfulness. The love of the brethren for Christ's sake must extend to the associate church, on the assumption that it is a congregation of faithful men and women who love and serve the Lord Christ. But inasmuch as all such companies of disciples may be expected to contain defective members, perhaps self-deceived, or it may be only pretenders, the confidence and affection and co-operation are extended towards the whole, as generally characterized by true godliness in heart and life. Inquiry is not made into the matter of exceptions; Christian charity embraces the whole, and loving fellowship and co-operation do the same. At the same time there is a principle in the case which may not be ignored and which is essential to fellowship, namely, that the churches of Christ are to be composed of those and those only who afford credible evidence of having been born again of the Spirit of God—having passed from spiritual death unto spiritual life. Without the practical recognition of this principle you cannot with propriety exercise the unity in fellowship and action which we exhibit in receiving the members of one church into another by simple letters of transference and commendation.

If such be a true view of the case then it would appear: 1. That precise accordance in the estimate of all Christian truth is not an essential element. There may be large diversity within the line of the non-essential. The range of truly evangelical sentiment and interpretation of Scripture admits of numerous points of difference within it, concerning which the best men fail to agree. The claims of fellowship, however, require them to agree to differ. 2. Not only in what we are wont to denominate as doctrinal truths may there be such diversity of sentiment, but also in practical duties there may be a wide difference of estimate without touching on unity in fellowship and action. *Inter alia* this point may be illustrated by the following questions: "Ought the Lord's Supper to be observed weekly or monthly or still less frequently?" "Is it proper to observe it without an ordained pastor as the presiding brother?" "If a professing Christian has been cut off from the fellowship of a church for flagrant iniquity, what amount of evidence of repentance would justify his restoration thereto, and how long time of probation should be required?" "If a minister of Christ and pastor of a church should be in this sad case, what evidence should be required in his case, and then is he or is he not, though truly penitent, disqualified for further ministerial and