

THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE ALGOMA CLERGY, AUG., 1887.

By REV. C. A. FRENCH.

IN my last short sketch of a journey—Garden River to Parry Sound—I found I made two huge mistakes. I presumed some person other than myself would have taken up the work of the Algoma Conference in Parry Sound and reviewed it in the CANADIAN CHURCH MAGAZINE; and further, I called this assembly a “convention.” No one it seems has taken the pains to tell the public what the great wiseacres of “Rockland” did, and I find I trespassed on the rights and liberties of our brethren across the border in styling our meeting a “convention.” It was nothing of the sort. It was a “conference,” and nothing more. Having no powers we took unto ourselves no powers, but simply saw each other face to face, and transacted a certain “business” that had to be transacted.

On the 4th of August, in the year of Jubilee of Victoria the Good, there met together in council in the lumbering village of Parry Sound, which is situated at the mouth of the Seguin river, eighteen presbyters of the Church of England in Canada, presided over by Edward, second Bishop of Algoma. One came from Thunder Bay, in the far west of the diocese, and another from Gravenhurst, in the south-east, and the remainder from various places within 80° and 90° west longitude. It was a most solemn gathering together of missionaries who have been and are, for Christ's sake and the sake of the Church, exposed to the difficulties and dangers incident to the “missionary” cause, in one of the wildest parts of the world. There was nothing very great and grand in this conference, with the exception of his lordship the bishop and the out-west man (who by the way are “big” men in more ways than one). The rank and file of the Algoma clergy are, I presume, like the rank and file of the Church's army in every such diocese, men attached to and attaching themselves to the duties of their profession. After the assembling of the clergy in Trinity Church, Holy Communion was celebrated by the bishop, assisted by his commissary and chaplain, thereafter the business assembly took place in Duke's hall. Here his lordship read his charge to the clergy of Algoma, wherein he stated that we were in session to discuss:

- (1) The advisability of having representation at Provincial Synod.
- (2) The organization of a widow and orphans' fund.
- (3) The future of the Algoma Mission News, and
- (4) The future internal administration of the diocese.

After a long and sometimes very searching debate, on each and all the questions, it was agreed that at present we were to have no Synod; that we were to satisfy ourselves just now with the position we occupy as a part of the Canadian Church. From the tone of the debate one could gather that,

seeing we are at present a diocese dependent upon outside aid and sympathy and that we must continue to get this aid and sympathy or die, we cannot just now avail ourselves of the generous offer of the Provincial Synod held in Montreal. Algoma it seems must still lean upon “crutches” for support. She is feeble, in her youth, and it will not do to waste her strength in “synodical” actions and synodical debating until her limbs are stronger, and like the pioneer farmer, she has made her little “clearing” and got a few dollars from off her “free grant lands.” There is no use in a “jackdaw” taking unto himself “peacock's” feathers, and the time has not arrived to send “giants” from the forest to wrestle in debate with the older dioceses.

Touching the “widows' and orphans' fund,” it was decided that in addition to the sums already in hand *an offertory was to be taken up each year in each mission* for this fund, and it was so arranged that in cases of the decease of any clergyman at an early date, leaving a widow and orphans unprovided for, they were to receive an annuity sufficient to keep them from actual want.

Mr. Wilson wished to resign the editorship of the *Algoma Mission News*, but after much persuasion he agreed to occupy this by no means easy office for at least another year, the clergy binding themselves to furnish him with material derived from their own experiences.

The internal organization of the diocese was put on a different footing to that which has hitherto prevailed. Following the advice of the bishop the diocese was “divided up” into four quarters—Thunder Bay, Algoma, Parry Sound and Muskoka, and Rev. Messrs. Machin, Beer, Chowne and Llyud were chosen by the conference (each division electing its own) rural deans. In addition to this it was decided, for “conference” purposes, to divide the diocese into two districts, one east of French river and one west, and to have it east and west alternately, a “district” meeting of the clergy to be followed by a “triennial” conference of the whole body in the year the Provincial Synod meets. For the purpose of business connected herewith Rev. G. Gilmour of North Bay was appointed secretary for “eastern” division, and I take the “western.”

The conference is over. We are in the midst of the missionary routine once more, but it was indeed good for each one of us that we met. We are new men to-day. Big as our bishop was in our eyes before the conference he is bigger now. Big as our friend out west is, he is not too big that he does not feel he wants sympathy and kindly feeling (he was sick at heart because of his loneliness) and we can give it to him now with better grace that we know his own kindly, fatherly countenance.

Yes, Algoma has changed within the past few weeks. To the world approaching us we may have the same wild, rugged, forbidding aspect, but towards one another and with all towards the outside world we are changed in tone. We are, I trust, more humble, more sincere in our attachment to the Church of our forefathers and the great