

THE
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A DENOMINATIONAL DANGER.

SO much is said and written, now-a-days, in favour of a "progressive" theology, and liberty, and comprehension, and against sects, and dogmas, and the "old paths," generally, that it may be permitted, perhaps, to one who is *not* a "liberal" in such matters, to say a word on the other side.

And first, let us say that we claim no unquestioning acceptance of what is old in theology, any more than in natural science, simply because it is old. Gray hairs ought to bring wisdom and discrimination with them, and, as a general rule, they do. But there certainly are exceptions—among ecclesiastics as well as other folk—and with such exceptions before us, there is an end to any claim to infallibility in that direction. Nobody that we have ever met ever claimed it. The nearest approach to it that we know of is in the *air* of some of the younger members of this same "progressive" school, who, under the "inspiration" of their own genius, and before their beards are well-grown, are able to laugh to scorn all the "stereotyped" ideas of their fathers, in regard to the atonement and the work of the Holy Spirit and future punishment, and tell us what "the Church of the future" will believe! If there is anything *assured* in the wide realm of theological science, it is what *they* "know" about it!

Neither let it be supposed that we claim that all is now known that can be or will be known, as to the teaching and interpretation of God's Word. Eighteen centuries of study and prayer have been spent upon it, but there are still mines of wealth in it that have never yet been discovered, and priceless gems not yet snatched from the unfathomed caves of its ocean fulness. "The law of the Lord is perfect," and the fact that no system of theology yet educed from it can lay claim to any such perfection; or completeness and harmony in all its parts and relations is proof that we have much yet to learn in the school of Christ.

But while all this is freely admitted, one cannot help asking the question, whether it is possible, that upon such important and even vital points, as those above referred to, upon which there has been such a general *consensus* of the Church of God, in all ages and countries, the "orthodox" churches can have been all wrong, and Unitarians and Transcendentalists right? Has all the study, and has all the prayerful, tearful up-looking for the teaching of the Holy Ghost, through these eighteen centuries, been in vain? Or does the Spirit of Truth now teach an "advanced" theology, more suited to the freer "thought" of the day?

No doubt it is allowable for us occasionally

as Congregationalists to boast ourselves a little, as Paul did, of "our liberty which we have in Christ." It is a precious birthright which we cannot too jealously guard, and hand down to our children after us. But there are other things to be guarded as well as liberty, and just now the danger threatening us as a denomination is to be looked for in an entirely different direction. There is a tendency in many quarters, not only to decry *creeds*, but to undervalue *doctrine*, and to regard one faith as about as good as another. The Athenian spirit is abroad, and the question is too often not what is *true*, but what is *new*. In such circumstances it is specially incumbent upon us to remember the counsel of the Lord to Israel, to "ask for the old paths, where is the good way," and to walk therein.

Of course it is highly commendable and Christian to be charitable, and to judge of men's creeds by their lives, and by the success of their ministry. But we must beg leave to doubt the power of any preaching, however eloquent, to convert and save the souls of the hearers, that practically *leaves out the atonement*, and co-related doctrines. Of such preachers and preaching, Paul, who wrote some excellent things about *charity* to the Corinthians, wrote also some very severe things to the Galatians (chap. i. 7-9), which we cordially commend to the attention of all "liberal" Christians.

OUR JUNE GATHERING.

OF all the seasons, spring appears to be the most energetic. It seems to set everything a-going. It starts the birds to make their nests. It sends the farmer to his field, and arouses the forces of the female mind to the dread necessity of house-cleaning. It is a time of life and movement. Even upon the dull and stolid clergy it has no small effect. It awakes the dormant, gregarious instinct. It draws them from quiet manse and parsonages in search of the excitement and stimulus which comes from contact with other minds.

The railroad cars even now begin to take on a more sanctified look. The very locomotives from head-light to tender seem weighed down by the consciousness of having so much theology behind. The M. E. Church has held one conference, and is now hard at another. The Canada Methodists are preparing in their district-meetings for their approaching gathering. The Presbyterians will soon be setting their faces towards the dominion capital. Other denominations are falling into line and among them the Congregationalists. Already the worthy householders of Kingston are beginning to gauge the situation. "Punch" records the following dialogue:—"Squire (to new butler), 'I have three or four clergymen to dine with me tomorrow, Prodggers, and——' Prodggers, 'Igh or low, sir?' Squire, 'Well—I hardly—but

why do you ask, Prodggers?' Prodggers, 'Well, you see, sir, the 'igh drinks most wine, and the low eats most wittles, and I must provide accordin'.'" The Kingston ladies will probably find that most of their visitors are Low Churchmen. The wine-bottle will sparkle in safety, but woe unto the "wittles." Still, we are sure of a hearty welcome no matter how keen the clerical appetite may be.

We hope to have a good time. City men who have a good deal in the way of ministerial fellowship at all seasons, may not place any special value on this season. But their more secluded country brethren count it a rare treat to have this opportunity of flocking together with birds of their feather. They will come, the old and the young, the droll and the sad, the quiet and the restless. They will mingle together, and there will be all the sparkle and effervescence produced when such diverse elements enter into combination. There will be joking, laughter, repartees sharp and witty, conversations long and sweet. We repeat it, we hope to have a good time.

But we hope to have something more than a time of enjoyment. The country's depression, which makes business men sober and thoughtful, may well affect even the rollicking spirits of the clergy. We have grave problems to face. Our missionary society and our college are not as firm-based financially as we would like to see them. As a denomination we are not keeping as fully abreast with this country's advancement as we should. Hundreds of emigrants and millions of capital are streaming into our great North-western plains, and as yet Canada has planted no Congregational Church there. Can we afford to be a stationary denomination in the midst of a progressive people? With these considerations before us let us come together as earnest, thoughtful men. Above all, let us be mindful of the fact that we are Christians, and as such, should be even painfully interested in the success of Christ's kingdom in this land. Whatever else we remember, let us remember that we are His. Whatever we forget, let us not forget that we are subject to His call.

There is one point yet that should be mentioned. Let none of us come to the union in a selfish spirit. Let no one in false humility be content to take the position of the dogs that eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table. We have no right to be receiving ever, and giving never. Let each one help to make the union a success. Then selfishness may crop out in this way. Kingston is a place that affords considerable facility for pleasure-taking. There will be the temptation to make a boat-ride or a visit to the penitentiary a primary consideration, and attendance on the union a secondary. Don't let that temptation be too strong. Let our principle be, Seek first the success of the union,