

Papers on Methodist History.

THE FIRST UNION BETWEEN THE ENGLISH AND CANADIAN CONFERENCES.



IN the preceding chapter we traced the progress of Methodism in Canada down to the time when it became a distinct and independent Church. It now remains to state the causes which led that Church to unite itself in filial bonds with the Parent Body in England. In doing this it will be necessary, in the first place, to point out the real position of affairs at this juncture.

It will be remembered that, in 1820, the American and English Conferences had agreed to divide their jurisdiction in the Canadas,—the latter body confining its labors to the Lower, and the former to the Upper, Province. But when, in 1828, the Societies in Upper Canada became a separate and independent Church, the English Conference considered that agreement as no longer binding, and that they were at liberty to send their Missionaries into any part of the Province where their services might be desired by the people. In accordance with this view the English Committee decided upon an immediate increase of their staff of laborers in the Canadas.

It has been doubted by some whether the Committee were justified in holding the views above indicated. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt they were perfectly sincere and conscientious. Richard Watson, Joseph Benson, and James Buckley (at that time Missionary Secretaries), were not the men lightly to break an engagement, or to interfere with the labors of a kindred Society, without some weighty reasons. The reasons were, 1st. That the American Conference having withdrawn its jurisdiction over the Societies in Canada, they (the English Missionary Committee) were released from the engagement formerly entered into with that body. 2nd. Within a few years a large number of Methodist emigrants from Great Britain had settled in Upper Canada. These earnestly desired the ministrations to which they had been accustomed in their fatherland, and strongly urged the English Committee to send Missionaries among them. 3rd. The Canada Conference was utterly unable to meet the spiritual wants of the people. The population of the Upper Province was about 175,000; there were but few ministers of other denominations, and the whole number in the Canada Conference was but 43! Besides this, our Missionary Society was yet in its infancy—its funds low, and its laborers few. Surely, then, there was great need for *some* Society to enter the field.