

The Canadian Independent

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We would again call the attention of our subscribers to the label on their paper showing the amount due. If the label does not indicate \$1 then a year's subscription is due. Will you send it at once? Nearly half of the current year's issue has been sent out and not nearly half of the subscribers have paid their dollar. Let us have it at once.

THE COUNCIL AT ST. LOUIS.

We drew attention last week to the opening of the Great Congregational Council, there are yet a few items of special interest to us which we now proceed to mention:—

Two subjects demanded special attention, the subject of Creeds, and of Ministerial standing. Strange to say, the Council came to unanimous findings thereon, save one negative vote on the latter topic. Both these topics touch a sensitiveness not to be regretted, on ecclesiastical liberty, yet there are evident demands upon our churches at this juncture which should, as at the Council they were, be frankly and boldly met; we must meet them in Canada or become for all real influence and work defunct. The subject of Creeds was formally introduced into the Council by overtures from the Ohio, Central South, and Minnesota conferences, followed by an elaborate paper thereon by Dr. Hiram Mead of Oberlin, Ohio, and the discussions closed by the appointment of seven delegates who were to appoint a committee of twenty-five representing the different shades of thought in the churches; this Committee of twenty-five to undertake the work, and present the result to the Churches through the press, to carry with it such weight as its intrinsic merits may demand.

Dr. Mead in the paper referred to never thinks of enquiring "Shall we have a Creed?" furthermost from his thoughts and evidently from the minds of the more than three hundred representative Congregationalists there, was the idea of Congregationalism being creedless, the questions discussed were "What is involved in a new doctrinal statement?" "Is such a new statement desirable?"

Such men as Cromwell and Milton, John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, would have stood aghast at the assumption of Independency having no creed, or the supposition that its principles, like jelly, would fit into any mould with a little heat. The Savoy Conference represented Independency in those days, A.D. 1658; the old New England churches had set forth ten years previously the Cambridge platform, a general declaration of the faith and polity of those churches. Historically Congregationalism has never been without a declaration of principles, a statement of belief, a creed. Nor has it been ever deemed by the great body thereof that the liberty and right of churches have thereby been meddled with. Let it be however understood in what sense we hold to a creed,

without in any sense assuming the right of authority over brethren. The starting point is simple—"No creed, however fashioned, can in any way be made the creed of any church till that church has in some formal way freely adopted it." From this right, justly argues Dr. Mead, flows another, the liberty to unite with other churches in Christian work and fellowship, and if a church has a right to organize, why should not a consociation of churches organize, so long as that organization does not impair the authority of the individual church? Ultra Independency virtually denies this right, not allowing of formal fellowship through councils or Associations, whilst Congregational Independency, no less watchful over the right of self control, claims the further right of organized co-operation. For authority means the right to go away from home, as well as to stay at home, to associate with our neighbors, as well as lock the door against them. And when by quoting Dr. Emmons' famous dictum "Associationism leads to Consociationism, and Consociationism to Presbyterianism, and Presbyterianism to Episcopacy, and Episcopacy to Roman Catholicism," which is an ultimate fact, or by some other terror, alarmists would frighten our free churches out of the exercise of the right to join these voluntary Associations, thus spying out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they may bring us into bondage to a narrow and restrictive Independency, let us "give place to them by subjection not for one hour." Now there can be no Association without some common basis of action and belief, and Congregationalism, in its history, has ever held doctrine to be paramount to polity, hence some declaration of faith as well as of order seems inevitable. Is that declaration of faith or creed to be imposed? This really brings us to the radical difference between a Congregational and, say, a Presbyterian Creed. The Presbytery opening its confession says:—"Do you accept this." The Congregational Council or Association would rather enquire "What do you find taught in the Holy Scriptures?" The applicant for fellowship being asked to state for himself his belief, the Council simply deciding whether it is sufficiently in accord with the Consensus of the denomination to allow of harmonious and united action. For this purpose a declaration is needed, we have a common faith, why not state it? "I do," says one, "it is found in the Bible, what need of any other?" Sixty years ago, Dr. Mead reminds the American Churches, that a number of Congregational Ministers appealed to the Bible in support of their thorough Unitarian views, claiming their Independency, and at the same time, continued fellowship. But if the individual pastor or church may appeal to the Bible, most assuredly a confederation of churches can do the same thing, and where the faith of the confederation is not the faith of the individual, separation is inevitable.

These considerations require great care on the part of those who draw up declarations, that they should deal chiefly with facts, and these the simple essentials of the Gospel of God's grace in Christ revealed. This consensus of acknowledged verities should be in the living language of

the day. The theological languages of the old symbols are to the many really dead languages, hence the desirableness of a creed representing the attitude of our churches, now towards the burning question of the day. Our fathers were not afraid to speak out, why should we? One of the curses upon the creed world of Christendom to-day is the veiling of the true attitude behind the ambiguity of expressions in creeds virtually obsolete, and therefore open to a double interpretation. Let us have an honest statement of what we believe, unless our belief is too shadowy for words to even attempt, and we know of no body more free to attempt this desideratum of the Christian world to-day than our own, if we only can prove ourselves to be the men to do it. Many are the voices calling for what Dr. Schaff at the Pan-Presbyterian Council, in Edinburgh three years ago, calls "a testimony of the living faith of the church, and a bond of union among the different branches of the Reformed family." What denomination more untrammelled than ours to lead the way therein?

The question of ministerial standing we must leave for a future article, we close this by words from Dr. Mead's paper, which may apply nearer home than the United States:—"As Congregationalists we have freely enough exercised our inalienable right to disagree. Churches have abundantly demonstrated their ability to manage church affairs in a way quite contrary to the judgment of our wisest and best men. The demonstration has been quite complete, and we have sacrificed not a little in numbers and strength to make it. Now, let us show that we have just as good, just as inalienable a right to agree as to disagree; the right, that is, of paying reasonable deference to the judgment of others, and to get what light we can from them upon what we need the most of all to understand, the doctrines of the Bible."

SOME PROPHECIES AND THEIR INTERPRETERS.

It may be interesting to some whose minds are at times exercised about impending calamities, threatening conjunction of planets, prophetic declarations concerning ending dispensations, *et omne hoc genus*, (which means *all such kind of nonsense*), to recall a few facts of days gone by, that the experiences of the past may speak some word of wisdom and guidance. We say "to some," for we are quite conscious of the fact which Solomon notes, Prov. XXVII. 22.

The writer recollects when a boy going home from school with beating heart because of a report that St. Patrick's day was to witness dire calamities. Notably that London—the modern Babylon described Rev. xviii.—had reached her acme, and that that day was to witness her fall. There was a strange intermixture of Scripture declaration and Mother Shipton lore, though their expectation was based upon a weird prophecy reported to have been uttered by some one, somewhere in A. D. 1203, and another, equally startling, by a Dr. Dee (etymologically connected with and derived from fiddle-dee) A. D. 1598. We give the letter:—

The Lord have mercy on you all
Prepare yourselves for dreadful fall
Of house and land and human soul,
The measure of your sins is full,
In the year one eight and forty two,
In the year that is so new:
In the third month of that sixteen,
It may be a day or two between
Perhaps you may be stiff and cold.
Dear Christian, be not stout and bold—
The mighty, kingly proud will see
This comes to pass as my name's Dee.

This prophecy was said to have been read in the Harleian collection of manuscripts in the British Museum, where it was afterwards sought for but could not be found. We need not remind the thoughtful reader that London still awaits the day.

The city seems to have ever been the most fruitful soil for sowing prophetic seed, and London has recorded many examples. The wisdom of the old interpreters has not departed, nor the opposite quality from the listener.

We give an example of ingenious unravelling of mystic lines. A couplet credited to Merlin thus reads;—

When hemp is ripe and ready to pull
Then Englishman, beware thy skull.

This jingle which ought to remind the wrong doer more of the gallows than anything else, was thus most learnedly interpreted by one skilled in such lore in Elizabeth's time. Scripture unfortunately received just such handling to the neglect of the mysteries of righteousness and love. "The word HEMPE has five letters which thus read: H signifieth the good King Henry, E means his successor Edward, M Queen Mary with P for Philip of Spain who married her, and lastly E means Queen Elizabeth at whose death let England expect great trouble about the succession. These troubles, however, did not come, but the sly rogue who had interpreted and still lived on in King James' day was nothing daunted and rose to explain, "yet was the saying true seeing there has been a great mortality."

Ecclesiastical history is full of religious crazes. The mystic number 666 has overturned the papacy in prophetic imagination, at least half a dozen times; even as the supposed Hebrew form of "Luther" has satisfied the requirements of the same six hundred three score and six, and thus unmistakably pointed out that arch heretic to Roman Catholic eyes as the mystic beast.

Not many months ago an oriental specialist discovered without doubt the long lost ten tribes of Israel in the Japanese, as they were long since most certainly found in the Jewish caste of Abyssinian features and other "identifications." The truth is anything that will prove an opiate to the religious conscience, and leave men free to gratify their vanity and their greed is eagerly sought and delighted in to the neglect of those teachings and precepts which Christ has placed before those who truly seek his spirit. Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, they who rest there may sometimes be obscured by the dust the adversary raises in every conceivable way, but the atmosphere will clear, the true light shine, and they on the rock continue forever and forever.

WE are glad to find that the notorious Sara Bernhardt is not meeting with a very encouraging social reception in the States. Whatever success may have attended her performances—and at the best that has not been very enthusiastic apparently—the almost entire absence of all people of position and character from