

The Religious World

Presbyterian General Assembly

There has been such quiet in Presbyterian circles during the year that it has been supposed that peace was coming to that Church, but, unless present signs fail, the Assembly at Saratoga is likely to be no more peaceful than the one at Washington. To be sure, the Briggs question is not likely to have the same prominence, but the case of Professor Henry P. Smith remains to be disposed of, and there are not wanting evidences that the conservative party is determined that very decisive action shall be taken. From many liberal Presbyteries conservative delegations have been appointed, simply because the conservative element has been evidently alert all through the year. In New York even Dr. John Hall, after having been nominated, was rejected. Was it because he was too liberal? or because the conservative party had already arranged its ticket and would submit to no changes? Many of the liberal men have been waiting for the action of this Assembly, in the hope that it would be possible for them to dwell in unity and harmony in the Church in which they have been reared and have worked. Many bear the most honored names in that communion, and their services are such as should command for their utterances the most serious consideration. But, if the present indications are realized, the same spirit of aggressive intolerance which dominated the Washington Assembly will rule the one at Saratoga. In the midst of the almost universal interest in the subject of Christian union there rises one great note of discord. It looks to-day either as if a number of the oldest and most honored members of the Presbyterian communion would be driven out of that body, or as if there would be another division along the same lines that were supposed to be obliterated when the union between the Old and New Schools was consummated. The question to-day is practically the same as when Albert Barnes was the most prominent figure, and the names so frequently heard a generation ago—"Old School" and "New School"—are already appearing again.

The New Jersey Congregational Association

The State Association of the Congregationalists of New Jersey, which was held at Trinity Congregational Church in Orange, April 17-19, will be memorable for several reasons. A new plan was inaugurated of having the retiring Moderator deliver an address on some topic of current interest. The Moderator of last year was the Rev. John L. Scudder, of Jersey City. He chose for his topic "The Elimination of the Distinction between Sacred and Secular," and it was treated in the aggressive way so characteristic of the speaker. The next change was in the choice of a preacher. It was felt by the members of the Association that it would be a great privilege to listen now and then to eminent preachers from other denominations, and so the sermon at this meeting was preached by the Rev. J. H. Ecob, D.D., of Albany. He chose for his subject "Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of the God-Consciousness in Man." It was clearly recognized that he was presenting but one side of the great fact of the Incarnation. The sermon was full of the exquisite expression, the fine and positive thought, and the clear spiritual insight which characterize all of Dr. Ecob's utterances. The other prominent features of the meeting were the address by Professor Gould, of Johns Hopkins, on "Rational Methods of Temperance Reform," and the addresses in the Woman's Hour by Miss Bradford, Mrs. Bond, and Mrs. Bird on various phases of woman's work. Miss Bradford spoke for the Whittier House in Jersey City, Mrs. Bond for Foreign Missionary Work, and Mrs. Bird for the Lodging-House Work in New York. All the meetings were pre-eminently practical, and no time was lost in the transaction of business, since all that is left to the local churches. The interest culminated with the closing session, when the report of the Committee on Church Unity was presented.

The Report on Church Unity

The Committee on this subject consisted of Drs. Amory H. Bradford, Chairman, William Hayes Ward, S. M. Newman, F. W. Baldwin; the Rev. C. H. Patton, and Messrs. D. A. Waters and T. F. Seward. A preliminary report had been prepared by Dr. Ward, which, with various modifications and additions, was finally adopted as the report of the Committee. In its preamble it refers to the importance of Christian unity, and the value of the propositions looking toward unity which have already been made by the Protestant Episcopal Church and the Disciples of Christ. It emphasizes the fact that in the Congregational polity the liberty of each Christian to interpret for himself the Holy Scriptures, and of each local body of Christians to maintain its chosen manner of worship and direct its own affairs, is fundamental and cannot be infringed upon; that any plan of corporate union must have a large place for the liberty of the individual conscience and the rights of the local congregation. The Chicago-Lambeth Articles, it declares, could undoubtedly be accepted if the article concerning the Historic Episcopate is interpreted in such a way as to give liberty to views held in both Episcopal and Congregational bodies concerning that institution. The report says: "This we might do, not because we believe the system necessary, but for the sake of meeting our brethren and accommodating our practice to theirs. And we think it could be done without interfering with the independence of our churches." To the Protestant Episcopal Church and to all other Churches which have the episcopate it says that it favors negotiations looking toward unity with all on the terms of liberty of interpretation. Concerning the Reformed or Presbyterian Churches it suggests the formation of an alliance among all evangelical non-Episcopal Churches, on somewhat the same basis as the alliance of Churches holding the Presbyterian polity. Concerning Churches holding Congregational polity, such as the various Baptists, Disciples, Christians, and Free Baptists, the report says that Congregationalists could unite with the Disciples of Christ on the basis of their three propositions, provided liberty of interpretation concerning the sacraments was allowed, and could unite with all the Baptists provided liberty of interpretation of the Scriptures and of practice accordingly was granted to individuals. Concerning the Free Baptists and the Christians the report clearly recognizes that union is already possible, and definitely says: "In our longing for unity we desire to accept any terms which they, in the exercise of their Christian affection, could ask. And to this end we invite correspondence with them." The report concludes:

In brief, we propose to the various Protestant Churches of the United States a Union or Alliance, based on:

1. The acceptance of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, inspired by the Holy Spirit, as containing all things necessary to salvation, and as being the rule and ultimate standard of Christian faith.
2. Discipleship of Jesus Christ, the Divine Saviour and Teacher of the world.
3. The Church of Christ ordained by him to preach his Gospel to the world.
4. Liberty of conscience in the interpretation of the Scriptures and in the administration of the Church.

Such an alliance of these Churches should have regular meetings of their representatives, and should have for its objects, among others:

1. Mutual acquaintance and fellowship.
2. Co-operation in domestic and foreign missions.
3. The prevention of rivalries between competing Churches in the same field.
4. The ultimate organic union of the whole visible Body of Christ.

Voted, That this paper be communicated to other State Associations and Conferences, and to the National Council, for their consideration and action.

This seems to us the most positive and clear note which has ever been uttered by a Congregational body, and its reception by various State Associations and by the National Council will be eagerly watched.

A very important meeting was held in Philadelphia on the 12th of April, when representatives of eight of the Presbyterian and Reformed denominations met to take action concerning Federal Union, which plan had been reported to their various Assemblies last year. The Churches represented were the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the Reformed Church in America, the Reformed Church in the United States, the United Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church (General Synod), the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Synod), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Associate Reformed Synod of the South. The plan which was proposed was unanimously approved, and will be considered during the coming year by the Synods and Assemblies of the various Churches. We do not need to publish the plan in full. It is sufficient to say that it seeks practically a federation for aggressive work of all the denominations represented; and, if this be accomplished, denominational overlapping

will no doubt be prevented, and the common work will be carried on with far more vigor and economy than has been possible under the old order. This is still another step in the direction of the unity of the Church, and illustrates the principle which we have so often emphasized—that unity will be reached through growth. It must be realized first among the general divisions of the Christian Church. When the various branches of the denominational family have come together, it will then be seen, no doubt, that no more reasons exist for the separation of the leading denominations than were formerly supposed to exist for the separation of the grand divisions into smaller bodies.

Since the meeting of the Parliament of Religions in Chicago two or three members of that body have devoted themselves to lecturing in various parts of the United States against the missionary work in India. One of them—Vivekananda—has been speaking in Detroit, and, as a result of his lectures, an interesting correspondence has appeared in the "Free Press" of that city. The Hindu monk has met an able and courteous antagonist in the Christian missionary Robert A. Hume. We have seldom read anything more courteous and more utterly conclusive than the letters of Mr. Hume. The Hindu monk unqualifiedly denounced the missionaries; he had not one good thing to say about them. Mr. Hume begins his letter, "My Fellow-Countryman from India." He is entitled to begin it in that way because he was himself born in India and has spent the greater part of his life there. To the general description of the missionaries given by the Hindu Mr. Hume opposes the testimony of the most influential Hindu paper in southern India, published in Madras by Hindus for Hindus, its name also being "The Hindu." Concerning the missionaries it says: "They are not, as a class, very brilliant men, but possess average ability, and a few of them are really magnificent men. But it is not so much their intellectual as their moral qualities that challenge admiration. Their simple lives, their sympathy with the poor, their self-sacrifice, all force admiration from their critics." The second charge was against the converts. It was practically declared that converts were made only among the most degraded and ignorant classes. To this Mr. Hume responds by mentioning the names of a long list of very eminent native Christian scholars, honored and widely known in India. He also quotes the testimony of the Government Director of Public Instruction of the Madras Presidency, which we condense as follows: "The educational progress of the native Christian community is so great that, if the present policy of the Hindus continues, it will not be long before the Christians will have a preponderating position in all the great professions and in the industrial enterprise of the country." In regard to the relative merits of the Hindu and the Christian systems, Mr. Hume points to the religious teaching and the legislation, especially concerning the position of woman. He quotes copiously, and always from Hindu papers, concerning the work which has been done there; shows that the charge that the missionaries do not know the language is baseless; that they not only know the popular language, but that many of them are recognized authorities in Sanskrit. The reply of the monk is evasive, and closes with the simple assertion that it is not possible for foreigners to know the people of India, that it is not possible for Mr. Hume, even though he was born in that country. Mr. Hume responds with a second letter, which closes the correspondence. From this we quote the following: "The Director of Public Instruction reported that in the Madras Presidency—the very part where you deny the elevation of people when they become Christians—one out of every sixteen Christians was under instruction, and only one out of every sixty-four Hindus—four times as good a ratio for the Christians, most of whom were originally from the lower classes. In female education the Christians stand head and shoulders above all others."

It seems rather late for any general denunciation of missionary work. The missionaries need neither apology nor defense. Now and then Roman Catholics denounce Protestants, and Protestants fail to appreciate Romanists, but all who are without prejudice know that both often do most splendid work. The missionaries may some-

times misrepresent the Hindus, but it does not follow that therefore the Hindus are the only persons who are competent judges of what is being done by the missionaries. The avidity with which many Americans swallow every statement made by a Hindu is really amusing. There are many wise and noble Hindu men, but that does not make them infallible witnesses concerning what is being accomplished by those whom they confessedly dislike. At a meeting of the Congregational Club in New York Mr. Mozoomdar said that many of the missionaries were narrow and bigoted, and that they did not understand his people, but that as a body they had done magnificent service for India. They had educated the poor, fed the hungry, cared for the sick and dying, as no others even among his own countrymen. These facts are too well known and too well founded for any representative of another religious system to invalidate. Bigotry and narrowness are not the monopoly of any one class or any one nation. The missionaries ought to be very careful how they reflect upon the character and teaching of such men as Swami Vivekananda; and our people ought to be very slow about giving heed to the statements of the Hindu monk, concerning facts of which he is confessedly a prejudiced witness. As to this correspondence, we are sure that all who have read it will agree that Mr. Hume has established every position which he has taken, and has done so without one discourteous assertion or suggestion. The simple fact, to say the least, is that Vivekananda finds it quite as difficult to understand and appreciate the Christians as he imagines they find it difficult to understand his people. The Outlook will print before long two articles on this topic from Mr. Mozoomdar, with editorial comment.

The church life of England is influenced by that of America, and that of America by that of England. The latest illustration of this now evident fact is seen in the attempt of Dr. Pentecost to start among the Presbyterians of London something corresponding to the Social Unions on this side of the water. They are called clubs among Congregationalists, but among Baptists and Presbyterians the other name prevails. This movement now extends all over our country, and has been productive of great good in bringing members of various local churches into closer fellowship and sympathy. Nothing like our Congregational Clubs or Social Unions have thus far been known among the Nonconformists in Great Britain. Much interest was manifested in the subject by Congregationalists during the International Council, but we have not heard of any definite move in that direction. It required the presence of an American to add to the suggestion the force of his own personal knowledge. The leading Presbyterian ministers of London met by invitation with Dr. George F. Pentecost early in April to consider a plan for the formation of a Social Union among the churches of that order. With the exception of Dr. Oswald Dykes, all who spoke were warmly in favor of the scheme and confident of its success. Dr. Dykes did not object because of opposition to the principle, but he thought that the distances of London were so great, and the demands upon the ministers so many, that it was doubtful if any time would be found for making such an organization a success. He also feared that with the wealthier members such a Union would simply add one more to an overcrowded list of engagements, while provision would not be made for the attendance of the poorer people. Dr. J. Monro Gibson, however, thought that the very fact that the London churches found so little time for fellowship was a reason why such unions should be formed. We have often felt that our clubs and Social Unions in this country did not recognize clearly enough that many are prevented from becoming members because the expenses are too great. It is possible, however, that this applies chiefly to the large cities. There are difficulties in the way of such gatherings, but, on the whole, they have greatly promoted the cause which they were designed to advance, and we believe that they will be not less helpful in Great Britain. A difficulty might be encountered if it were possible for social distinctions to play a prominent part. The nobility and the common people might find it impossible for them to meet on an absolutely equal footing, as they must in such unions. But there are few of the nobility in any of the Nonconformist churches. We can easily appreciate