

METHODIST UNION.

The Bill Passes the Parliamentary Committee Without Amendment.

ARGUMENTS OF THE OPPOSITIONERS OF THE MEASURE.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

OTTAWA, March 4.—In the Private Bills Committee to-day, the Methodist Union Bill reported with amendments by the Sub-Committee was considered.

Mr. HOLTON read a letter signed by E. Bristol, Chairman, and Thomas Webster, Secretary of the Committee of Petitioners against the bill. The writers asked to be heard before the Committee by letter rather than personally, as they are unavoidably prevented from coming to Ottawa. The petitioners refer to the statement of Bishop Carman, that none of the time-honoured usages and ordinances of the Church which all true Methodists hold dear were left out. They contend that the constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church differs widely from that of other Methodist bodies. They instance the fact that the Methodist Episcopal Bishop is ordained instead of inducted, like the chief officer of other bodies, and they quote from the ordination service to show that this difference does exist. The petitioners also take exception to the remark of J. J. McLaren, legal adviser of the unionists, that though it was said the episcopacy was abolished, Bishop Carman contended he was not abolished. They contend that the office of bishop and the office itself are entirely distinct. They contend also that the basis of union provides for a system of church government which had no parallel in history. They refer also to the opinion of Mr. Bethune, Q.C., read before the General Conference, that the action of the Conference was a violation of the restrictive rules of discipline. Mr. Holton, reading this letter, said that it was from an important body of people, and he trusted it would receive at the hands of the Committee the careful consideration which it deserved.

QUESTION OF CHURCH DEBTS.

He read also a private letter, protesting against the provisions of the bill affecting the property of the Church, urging that the trustees, even though they dissented from Union, were left liable to the debts of the Church. This question came up in discussion on the clauses of the bill relating to property, especially clause 18, which reads:—"The said corporation in receiving, taking, or holding any property heretofore held by any of the said four denominations, shall not in anywise become responsible or liable for debts or obligations which have been contracted in respect thereto."

Mr. LISTER strongly objected to the clause. In many cases the debt on the Church was guaranteed by the trustees in the faith that the congregation would work together to pay it off and relieve them from the responsibility. If the property were vested in a new corporation and the congregation objected, the church might be closed up or sold and the debt of the trustees remain. In reply to suggestion that property itself was liable for debt, Mr. Lester said it very often became liable without a mortgage on the church. Moreover, debts on churches were very often much more than property would bring if sold. He however favoured the principle of Methodist union.

Mr. McLAREN said that when the trustees made themselves liable to pay the debt of the church, they did it knowing that the church might amalgamate with another body. If that result came about therefore, and the trustees left the church, they would be in the same position as if they had left the church when no amalgamation was proposed. No injustice was done them; no representation against this proposal had been made by any board of trustees in the connection.

Rev. Dr. RICE said that the new corporation really held no property, nor would it have the fund to pay off the liabilities were they put upon it. The effect of such a proposition as Mr. Lester made would be to block the whole project of union.

Clause 18, referred to above, was carried after some discussion.

DELAY ASKED FOR.

Mr. CAMERON (Victoria) read a letter from a clergyman who favoured union, asking for time because of a large number who had voted against union, and who should be given further opportunity to enquire into union before it should be finally decided upon. He represented that Bible Christian Church, one of the parties to this union, was a branch of the Church in England, that the parent church had refused assent to the union, and there would be a difficulty about the property if union were effected without that assent.

Mr. McLAREN explained that the connection between the Bible Christian Church in Canada and that in England was merely ecclesiastical; that the property of the Canadian body was held in its own name; and that the Conference of the Bible Christian Church in Canada had power to deal with it.

After further discussion the bill was passed, and ordered to be reported to the House.