

THE LIBERAL FIGHT.

In the fall of 1874, the following young men, who were then students of the State Normal University, organized a society, termed the "Liberal Club," which originally consisted of John Shearer, Samuel Wadsworth, L. B. Wood, Stephen Spear, Charles Howard, Christopher Stephenson, George Snelling, Asbury Crawford, — McPherson, — Hume, Adam Hoffman, and Geo. L. Hoffman, which was subsequently joined by W. C. Gemmill, S. B. Hursh, J. N. Hursh, Cyrus W. Picking, George Beaty, Albert Snare, Dorus Hatch, — Brown, a Hindoo, Charles Schwer, — Merriett, — Trenchard, and others. No one could become a member of this club unless he had met with the club for at least two evenings, and received the unanimous vote of all the members present at a regular meeting, nor unless the members were satisfied that the applicant for membership fully understood the nature and object of the club, which usually met in a small office on Main street, in Normal. The object of the club being mutual improvement, and an impartial investigation, as near as might be, of such subjects as might be deemed beneficial and of common interest to the members of the club, and that free scope should be given to a proper discussion of any subject under consideration, each member feeling that his honest opinions could be frankly stated and his doubts expressed without restraint, and that no matter how diversified the opinions of the different members would be, each member and his opinions should be treated with respect, whether upon questions of education, politics, science, morals, or religion. Hence the name, "Liberal Club." To many, the name suggested that the club was antagonistic to orthodox religion, but this was primarily foreign to its object, although, incidentally, its members invaded the domain of orthodoxy, for opinions were freely expressed upon various phases of religion, its creeds, doctrines, and sects, as well as upon other topics of interest. The club work consisted in reading and commenting upon Tyndall's Belfast address, Draper's Intellectual Development of Europe, Huxley, Darwin, Winshel on Evolution, Herbert Spencer, Butler's Analogy, Theodore Parker's Discourse on Religion, and other books of like character. Besides, essays were written by the members, and read and criticised by the club. All the members were liberally inclined in their religious views, and frequently gave expression to their religious sentiments in the Wrightonian and Philadelphian Societies of the Normal University. Of this, the strict orthodox members of these Societies disapproved, and especially those belonging to the Young Men's Christian Association; consequently, they arrayed themselves against the Liberal Club, and recognized its members as antagonistic to religion and its institutions, and endeav-

ored to tolerate no exercises in the Societies which tended to be at variance with orthodox doctrine. The Liberals, acting on the defensive, claimed that the Societies were secular institutions, and that there was no more impropriety in discussing theological subjects, in an honest and candid manner, than there was in treating other topics. This opposition to the Liberals brought about a zealous rivalry between the Liberals and their friends, and the Young Men's Christian Association and their sympathizers.

The strong opposition to the Liberals became clearly manifested in the Societies after the Liberals had arranged to prepare a programme for each Society, which was to consist of exercises given by members of the Liberal Club alone. The proposition had been accepted by Mr. Drayton, president of the Philadelphian Society, and Josiah Hodge, president of the Wrightonian Society. This was in the fall of 1874 or 1875. Adam Hoffman, who was a member of the Liberal Club, succeeded Mr. Hodge as president of the Wrightonian Society. It was during Hoffman's administration that the programme prepared by the Liberals for the Wrightonian Society was given. For admitting this programme, the president was censured by a majority vote of the Society. This motion was made and supported by members of the Young Men's Christian Association and others opposed to the Liberal Club. This motion called forth heated discussion for several evenings, and finally a motion to strike the vote of censure from the record prevailed, without a dissenting voice. Some of those who supported the motion of censure, after due deliberation, concluded that they were hasty. Thus, the trouble in the Wrightonian Society was ended, and harmony was restored. Soon after, the programme prepared by the Liberals for the Philadelphian Society, was given after some little opposition. No reasonable objection could be urged against the character of these programmes. They were in every respect commendable and worthy to be offered in the society halls. The opposition was to the privilege granted to the Liberals, rather than to the nature of their exercises. The leaders of the opposition to the Liberals were W. S. Mills, L. C. Dougherty, J. P. Hodge, James Ellis, B. F. Stocks, Kenyon and others.

The next contest took place in the Philadelphian Society at its spring election, when there were two candidates for president, viz.: Laybourn and Charles McMurry, the latter receiving the support of the Liberals, although he had no connection with them, and the former being the choice of the Young Men's Christian Association. There would have been no difficulty at this election had not Laybourn's supporters promulgated that the Liberal's were supporting McMurry, and that McMurry must be defeated. This caused an issue to be made between the Liberals and the Young Men's Christian Association, at this election. Both parties zealously engaged in

securing voters and advocating their claims. On the day of election, when the result was announced, it was evident that Charles McMurry was elected, whereupon a few of Laybourn's ardent supporters charged fraud upon the judges, George Beaty, D. C. Tyler and Miss Mary Anderson, and, at the following meeting of the Society, succeeded in carrying a motion for another election, without first duly investigating the election. This arbitrary move was denounced as unjust and illegal by McMurry's friends. The excitement was intense for several days. Special meetings were called for the purpose of determining the proper mode of proceeding for an investigation of the election, but no terms could be reached other than that there should be another election without further ceremony. The McMurry constituents refused to yield their position, as well as their antagonists. The strife was growing fiercer, day by day, and no compromise could be effected, until finally some of the members of the faculty saw proper and necessary to advise. Upon their suggestion that it would be best to consent to another election without further difficulty, the Liberals and McMurry's friends generally, yielded, and another election was called. The excitement had risen to such a pitch that it interfered with the regular school work of those who were most interested. As soon as it was conceded that there would be another election, both factions at once proceeded to solicit members to pay their dues, so that they could vote. Before the close of the election, the number of voting members in the Philadelphian Society was more than doubled, and the election again resulted in favor of Charles McMurry. Both candidates were highly esteemed by the students, and either would have been satisfactory so far as they were individually concerned. But the fight was between the factions, rather than for their candidates. When McMurry's election was announced, a scene of wild excitement took place, after an interval, of stillness, during the counting of the votes. After this election, all differences were adjusted, and the waging factions ceased their hostilities toward each other, and it was generously conceded by the leaders in the fight that both parties were too rash, and acted imprudently. It is an event that will always be remembered by those who attended school during the period of the Liberal contest. After sallies of passion and burning remarks, came deliberation and candor. Whatever the Liberal or the orthodox may have said in the Societies which was of sufficient force to call forth comment must at last have been of mutual benefit, either in tempering or strengthening both in their respective convictions.