The
Niagara Bible Conference

David E Griggs
NIAGARA BIBLE CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

Niagara-on-the-Lake, known for its pristine beauty and historical significance, often gathers tourists from various locations throughout the world who delight in the charms of this quaint town, occupying the rooms of the various hotels or just enjoying the serene settings of the lake or nearby golf courses. Shaw Theatre, named for George Bernard Shaw, is known for its celebrated enactments of literary classics, capturing the hearts of the patrons and who can neglect to mention, especially as we move into the celebrations of the war of 1812, the significance of Fort George in the historic struggle for the future of the Canadian identity.

Yet, nestled alongside of the gentle flowing river, removed from the rushing torrents that cascade over one of the great wonders of the world, is a place where serenity seems to magnetize people as they are drawn to either walk along the boardwalk or sit upon the grass or benches and allow the cares of life to be washed from them in the quietness of the moment. Regardless of the day there can be found people from near and far who gather by the waters and stare into them or sit and allow their minds to sift back through time, maybe to hear the ancient roar of the cannons of Fort Niagara or just gaze at the sailboats gliding effortlessly across the waters. One cannot escape, even sometimes among the busyness of tourists with the flashing of cameras, that there is something special, even sacred about this spot of ground.

There are small plaques that identify this location as significant in historical value but there is one plaque in particular, placed there by the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, formerly China Inland Mission, that states that Hudson Taylor once spoke there in 1888 at the Queen's Royal Hotel pavilion. Though significant and far reaching that event was it too was only packaged into a larger movement that sought to counter the tides of change that were sweeping over the church with the goal of redefining historic Christianity with the concepts of what is commonly known as Modernism. This counter movement to the rising tides of Modernism can trace its roots to Niagara-on-the-Lake and in particular to what has become be known as the Niagara Bible Conference, which gave birth to the Fundamentalist Movement of the early 1900's and has significance even to this day.
NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

Though known today as Niagara-on-the-Lake, historically the town has not always borne that name. Following the American Revolution many of those still loyal to the British crown, called United Empire Loyalists, left their farms and homes behind to seek a new beginning. By the “Constitutional Act of 1791”, the Parliament of Great Britain divided Quebec into Lower and Upper Canada. This was done primarily to allow lower Canada to continue with their French civil law and catholic religion and so that U.E.L. immigrants could have English laws and institutions.

Niagara-on-the-Lake has had different names in its history. Originally named Butlersburg, after John Butler, the settlement was renamed Newark by Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe in 1792 after a town in Nottinghamshire, England. Newark for a short time became the capital of Upper Canada and the seat of government. (Simcoe had a propensity to change the historic names of locations). Newark was easily accessible by water and land routes, protected both by Butler's Rangers, local militia and at that time Fort Niagara, though now on American soil but still in British hands. Parliament continued to meet here until 1796 when the seat of Parliament was officially moved to the new capital of Upper Canada, York and renamed Toronto by Simcoe. Interesting enough one of the significant acts of Parliament while still at Newark was to technically abolish slavery in Canada, though it remained legal until it was finally abolished by the British Parliament in 1834.

CAPTAIN THOMAS DICK

Following the ransacking of West Niagara during the war of 1812 and with the end of the war, the town began to rebuild and entrepreneurs took advantage of the fertile climate for personal growth and gain. One of these key entrepreneurs was a sea captain by the name of Thomas Dick. Originally from Scotland Captain Dick made his fortune navigating the waters as both captain/owner/joint owner of a number of passenger ships that travelled between York and Queenston. In this highly competitive market Dick began to expand his vision of not only transporting persons and cargo across or around Lake Ontario but to also provide accommodation for these passengers. With this vision in mind, in 1843 Dick built in Toronto “Ontario Terrace”, consisting of four brick houses. Whether selling at this point or later is unclear but “Ontario Terrace” was occupied by Knox Theological College. In 1853 the building was updated and renamed “Sword's Hotel” and with another change of ownership became the “Revere Hotel” In 1862 Captain Dick repurchased the hotel and renamed it “Queen's Hotel”. With the
growth of Toronto the “Queen's Hotel” became a hub of opulence for the elite of Toronto and eventually, with the passing first of the subsequent owners McGaw and then his partner Winnett in 1925, the property was purchased by Canadian Pacific Railway, the building torn down and the new “Royal York” hotel erected in 1929.

In 1869 Captain Dick entered on another hotel enterprise. Since passenger ships traversed the waters between Toronto and Queenston Dick began construction of a new hotel in the Niagara Region that would service both those that crossed the waters but also provide a place similar to “Queen's Hotel” in Toronto. This was not to be simply a wayfarer's inn but a landmark that would majestically stand tall at the point where the mighty Niagara shed her waters into Lake Ontario. With land purchased and construction completed the new hotel, “Queen's Royal Hotel”, would host the dignitaries of the empire for decades to come, with the future King George V staying here in 1901 as well as the hosting of international tennis tournaments.
AGNES DICK

Quite often in the writing of historical events there is a focus placed upon those considered to be the key people instrumental in defining a movement. Historical biographers love their heroes and may casually refer to persons of lesser notoriety but seldom do they give much time to the unsung heroes whose names have been lost in the annals of time but without the influence of these persons such events or even the change makers could not have effected the work that they are so often known to have done.

Agnes Dick is one of these unsung heroes. Without her influence such an event as the Niagara Bible Conference could never have occurred or had the concerted impact that it was later to have in the Fundamentalist Movement.

Agnes Dick was born in Scotland, orphaned at a young age and adopted by her neighbours, Captain Dick and his wife Katherine Martyn. Little is known of her early life after emigrating to Canada. It can be surmised that she would have sailed the lakes with her adopted father and been allowed into the wheelhouse or sat at the captain's table with notable dignitaries. What is known is that she was a devout Presbyterian who attended Knox Presbyterian church in Toronto and sat under the teaching of pastors like Parsons who became involved in the Niagara Bible Conference. Never married Agnes Dick gave herself to charitable purposes and is known as the first directress of the “Toronto Home For Incurables” (today the Queen Elizabeth Hospital).

Interested in a deeper study of the Bible and increased knowledge of its teachings led her to seek out others of like passion. Through her Presbyterian connections Agnes Dick would have been familiar with the journals of James Brookes, author of the Truth magazine, from St. Louis who was a leading
Presbyterian thinker and teacher and as well as other notable scholars of her day.

The theological landscape was quickly being challenged by liberalism or what is commonly known as “Modernism” which was eroding the theological underpinnings of the doctrinal positions of not only the Presbyterian church but other mainline denominations. As such annual meetings, which sought to unite those of similar theological persuasion of the central doctrines of Christianity, were springing up. These leaders were passionate about upholding the historic doctrines of the faith, centred around their understanding of the inerrancy* of the Scriptures, their belief in dispensationalism** as originally taught by John Darby (1800-1882) and Israel’s place in prophesy.

In 1866 John Inglis, author of the magazine “Waymarks in the Wilderness”, began an annual summer retreat called the “Believer's Meeting for Bible Study” to a group of small but influential circle of American evangelicals in which he began to teach dispensational theology coupled with the pretribulation*** understanding of the return of Christ. In 1875 a meeting in Chicago was organized for the continued study of the Bible. Originally designed for teaching Christian workers the historic and doctrinal truths but also recognizing the broader appeal it was expanded in 1876 to include anyone interested in committing a week in the summer months. It proved to be quite successful as over 1000 persons gathered for this one purpose, to study the Scriptures.

Agnes Dick, now the sole proprietor of the Queen's Royal Hotel, invited the “Believer's Meeting For Bible Study” to hold their annual meetings in Niagara-on-the-Lake. James Brookes, the clear leader of the movement, assumed presidency of this annual meeting and through his connections and influence invited the best and clearest conservative theologians of his day to teach these truths. With the continued growth and interest Agnes Dick, at her own expense, enlarged the pavilion to accommodate the growing crowds.

*Inerrancy Of Scripture: the Bible is without error in the original languages (Hebrew and Greek).
** Dispensationalism: is a theology in which a distinction is made between the covenants made to Israel in the Old Testament and to the church in the New Testament. The church does not replace Israel. God's has a plan for both. Israel will return to the land promised to Abraham and Israel's destiny will find fruition in the fulfilment of its destiny.
*** Pretribulation: The elect will be raptured prior to the Great Tribulation when Christ will return to judge the world and establish the 1000 year reign (millenium).
NIAGARA BIBLE CONFERENCE

The annual “Believer's Meeting For Bible Study” was hosted in different locations in the United States but it was decided that there was a need to anchor these annual meetings. Since it seemed “good to the Holy Spirit and to us” the Niagara Bible Conference began their annual meeting at the Queen's Royal Hotel in Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1883. With the exception of 1884 “The Believer's Meeting For Bible Study” retained their name until they were officially incorporated under the laws of Canada as the “Niagara Bible Conference” in 1890. Even though Agnes Dick died in 1893 the meetings continued under the leadership of Brookes until his death in 1897.

The format was simple. The annual meeting began on a Wednesday evening with an interdenominational prayer meeting. For the next seven days the attendees would bring a Bible, pen and note pad as they sat under the teachings of the conservative elite within church circles. There would be two messages in the morning, two in the afternoon and one in the evening. On the Sunday there was a gospel message in the morning followed by communion in the afternoon and a missionary message in the evening. Given the various denominational groups involved in these meetings and the divergence on various understandings of certain doctrinal issues this was a major accomplishment. Yet the leadership were galvanized around a central objective: “to lead earnest and enquiring souls into a deeper and more practical acquaintance with God's word”, with a special emphasis upon prophesy.

The leadership involved in these meetings would easily be listed in the “Who's Who” of conservative evangelicalism of the mid to late 1800's. James H. Brookes was a leading pastor in St. Louis, personally involved with the evangelistic work of D.L. Moody in St. Louis and became the mentor and friend of C.I. Scofield who later authored the Scofield Bible and who also taught at these meetings. W.E.Blackstone was a leading proponent of premillenialism, the rapture of the church and Christian Zionism, the return of Israel to its homeland (Israel never became a nation until 1948). Charles Erdman was a leader in the premillenialist movement and later a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, the institutional bedrock of the Fundamentalist movement. A.J. Gordon, an influential Baptist teacher/preacher founded Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. A.C. Dixon carried on his doctrinal fight in Chicago after the Niagara Bible Conference was discontinued. Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission and Jonathan Goforth, also an influential missionary to China attended along with A.T Pierson, author of the Missionary Review of the World. Charles Erdman, later professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, became a prolific New Testament author and a moderate against the early excesses of the fundamentalist movement.
The response of the people to the Niagara Bible Conference was remarkable. Setting aside one week of the year for intensive Bible study. Crowds continued to gather to hear not only the best of the conservative teachers but to hear the “Fundamentals”* of the faith expounded in clear and systematic ways. In 1892 Brookes penned these words in the “Truth” magazine: “more largely attended than ever before. Often every seat in the pavilion was occupied and the porches were filled with eager hearers of the Word. The place too has become more beautiful as the years go by, and it would be difficult to find a spot better suited to the quiet and prayerful study of the Sacred Scriptures. The building in which the conference meets overlooking Lake Ontario and the River Niagara and accompanied green trees, is secluded from the noise of the world; and so excellent were the arrangements for the accommodating of the guests, both in Queen's Royal Hotel and in the boarding houses of the village, that not a word of complaint was heard from anyone.”

* In 1910 a 12 volume set, penned by many of these teachers at the Niagara Bible Conference outlining the Fundamentals of the faith, was written and distributed with support from the Lyman brothers. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church coalesced these fundamentals into their five major doctrinal areas:

1. The inspiration of the Bible and the inerrancy of Scripture.
2. The virgin birth of Christ.
3. The belief that Christ's death was the atonement for sin.
4. The bodily resurrection of Christ.
5. The historic reality of Christ's miracles.
SEISMIC THEOLOGICALhifts

The focus of these early years was not to create a new movement within Christianity, such as what Fundamentalism developed into the next century, but to affirm and support the historic fundamental teachings of the church. These leaders saw themselves in a fight for the integrity and future of the church that demanded of them the fortitude of a Luther, the intensity of an Augustine, the evangelistic fervour of a Whitefield and the unswerving allegiance of an apostle as they stated in unequivocal terms the non-negotiables of the faith once delivered to man.

What was it that caused such a militancy among these leaders? Why were they so vehement in their opposition to “new teaching” both within and without the church. In October 1841 Charles Lyell visited Niagara Falls. He had authored his book called “Principles of Geology” in which he defended uniformitarianism, the belief that rejected the idea of catastrophism which stated that the earth was created or fashioned by cataclysmic events such as Noah's flood. Instead he proposed that the earth developed slowly over long periods of time in a uniform and measurable manner, thus uniformitarianism. When determining the geological date of Niagara Falls, Lyell examined the base of the Falls and noticed the limestone and shale formations and the tableland above the Falls and postulated that the Falls were 35,000 years old. He based this on his view, though different than the local residents who had lived in the area for years, that the Falls receded 1 foot per year and had receded 7 miles or 35,000 feet. As such the Falls must be 35,000 years old. (a local resident told him that the Falls receded 3 feet, not 1, and today geologists estimate that they actually recede 4-5 feet per year).

A second significant development was the evolutionary theory put forth by Charles Darwin. Though historically Darwin did not stand alone in the development of this scientific theory he became the forerunner and spokesman for this shift in thinking. Up to this point of time Bishop Ussher, Archbishop of Ireland, dated the creation of the world at October 23, 4004 B.C. using both the biblical and secular texts to arrive at his theory. Darwin had read Lyell's work on “Principles of Geology” and actually used it a reference book on his five year journey aboard the HMS Beagle. In 1859 Darwin published his book “On The Origin Of Species” in which he postulated his belief that all species of life have descended over time from common ancestors through the process of natural selection. By the 1870's the scientific community accepted this theory of evolution as scientific fact. The old dogmas, as interpreted through the church and that had stood for centuries, were now being replaced by new dogmas and a redefining of understanding of both the Bible and the doctrines that arose from it.
The Tubingen school of theology in Germany began using the same methodologies that the scientific world were employing. This new approach to the study of the Bible, which quickly became mainstream, was known as higher criticism. Higher criticism is the scholarly "study and investigation of scriptural texts that seeks to make discerning judgements about these writings." Viewing biblical texts as having human rather than supernatural origins, it asks when and where a particular text originated. It sought to discern the how, why, by whom, for whom, and in what circumstances it was produced. It sought to discover what external influences were at work in the development of the Bible. They wanted to know what sources were used in its composition and what message those sources intended to convey. Whether the focus is on the Old or New Testaments or the Gospels this forensic approach began to redefine the accepted authorships and messages of the Biblical texts. This theological shift also sought to discover who really was this historical Jesus, not as defined through faith but through historical research. Since the school of higher criticism rejected the supernatural, they also rejected the claim that the Bible is divinely inspired and as such approached their forensic analysis from a rationalistic viewpoint. They replaced the established claim that the author of the Pentateuch was Moses with multiple authors from various sources. They discerned multiple authors for the book of Isaiah. They opted for a later date for the book of Daniel. They viewed the monotheistic religion of Israel as evolving from polytheism, the worship of many gods. Denying the supernatural they chose to demythologize the Bible and to re-categorize the stories as myths, tales or the moral equivalent of Aesop's fables.

The theological centres for higher education began to teach this new theology in the seminaries and to train the next generation of leadership. By removing the theological and historical underpinning of the church and redefining the theological doctrines that the “old” church had upheld, the “new” church could cast away the dusty doctrines of divinity, the sinlessness of Christ, atonement, and virgin birth and embrace a culture longing for relevance and meaning. The church could move into Hell's Kitchen with its socializing influences, embrace other religious groupings as equals rather than the exclusivity of historic Christianity or enjoy the richness of Biblical stories without the dogmatizing of such. The landscape of the scientific and theological worlds were changing.
NIAGARA CONFERENCE 14 POINTS

The conservative branch of the church's response was in no measure one of passivity. They saw this as not just a challenge to the orthodoxy of the faith but a concerted effort by the liberal arm of the church to satanically and completely dismantle and reassemble the church in their own image. A.C.Dixon, one of the speakers from the Niagara Bible Conference, in 1899 would write,

The man who, under guise of learning or any other guise, weakens the faith of the people in the Bible as the Word of God, is an enemy to the Bible as the Word of God and is an enemy to the Church...and, tho I may love his soul, I hate his false way and pray that his efforts may be, by the working of almighty God, brought to naught”.

The response of the conservative branch of the church was militant. Pencils were sharpened in a prolific literary response. Pulpits were honed to preach against falsehood that undermined the truths of the Bible. The axiom “in essentials unity, in non-essentials charity” held together theologues who were now united with one purpose and one goal: to uphold the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, inspired by God and infallible.

As this annual conference continued to find favour among the conservative branch of the church and as it continued to grow yearly the leadership believed that the need existed to clearly define exactly what they believed and what they saw as critical to their understanding of what defined one as both a Christian and as a Christian church. A historic document was developed in 1878 that came to be known as the “Niagara Creed” which outlined the fundamentals of the faith and would give rise to the emphases of the Fundamentalist movement. Their starting point was the firm belief that the Bible is the Word of God because from that point all doctrine flows. They are listed as the leadership outlined them and the reader can discern for oneself that these were not drafted in an impassioned way but were the anchoring and the rallying point for future generations.

The 14 Point Creed

1. We believe “that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” by which we understand the whole of the book called the Bible; nor do we take the statement in the sense in which it is sometimes foolishly said that works of human genius are inspired, but in the sense that the Holy Ghost gave the very words of the sacred writings to holy men of old; and that His Divine inspiration is not in different degrees, but extends equally and fully to all parts of these writings, historical, poetical, doctrinal, and prophetical and to the smallest word, and inflection of a word, provided such word is found in the original manuscripts. (2 Tim.3:16,17; 2 Pet.1:21; 1 Cor.2:13; Mark12:26,36; 13:11; Acts1:16; 2:4.)
2. We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes and perfections, and worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence, and obedience. (Mark 12:29; John 1:1-4; Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 5:3; 4:2; 2 Cor.13:14; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 1:4-6).

3. We believe that man, originally created in the image and after the likeness of God, fell from his high and holy estate by eating the forbidden fruit, and as the consequence of his disobedience the threatened penalty of death was then and there inflicted, so that his moral nature was not only grievously injured by the fall, but he totally lost all spiritual life, becoming dead in trespasses and sins, and subject to the power of the devil. (Gen. 1:26; 2:17; John 5:40; 6:53; Eph. 2: 1-3; I Tim. 5:6; I John 3:8).

4. We believe that the spiritual death, or total corruption of human nature, has been transmitted to the entire race of man, the man Christ Jesus alone excepted; and hence that every child of Adam is born into the world with a nature which possesses no spark of Divine life, but is essentially and unchangeably bad, being enmity against God, and incapable by any education process whatever of subjection to His law (Gen. 6:5; Psa. 14:1-3; 51:5; Jer. 17:9; John 3:6; Rom. 5:12-19; 8:6, 7).

5. We believe that owing to this universal depravity and death in sin, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless born again; and that no degree of reformation however great, no attainment in morality however high, no culture however attractive, no humanitarian and philanthropic schemes and societies however useful, no baptism or other ordinance however administered, can help the sinner to take even one step toward heaven, but a new nature imparted from above, a new life implanted by the Holy Ghost through the Word, is absolutely essential to salvation, (Isa. 64:6; John 3:5, 18; Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:4-9; Tit. 3:5; James. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23).

6. We believe that our redemption has been accomplished solely by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made to be sin, and made a curse for us, dying in our room and stead; and that no repentance, no feeling, no faith, no good resolutions, no sincere efforts, no submission to the rules and regulations of any church, or of all the churches that have ever existed since the days of the Apostles, can add in the very least to the value of that precious blood, or to the merit of that finished work, wrought for us by Him who united in His person true and proper divinity with perfect and sinless humanity. (Lev. 17:11; Matt. 26:28; Rom. 5: 6-9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

7. We believe that Christ, in the fullness of the blessings He has secured by His obedience unto death, is received by faith alone, and that the moment we trust in Him as Saviour we pass out of death
into everlasting life, being justified from all things, accepted before the Father according to the measure of His acceptance, loved as He is loved, and having His place and portion, as linked to Him, and one with Him forever (John 5:24; 17:23; Acts 13:30; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:4-6, 13; I John 4:17; 5:11,12).

8. We believe that it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Saviour; and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude, and obedience: Luke 10:20; 12:32; John 6:47; Rom. 8:33-39; 2 Cor. 5:1; 6-8; 2 Tim. 1:12; I John 5:13

9. We believe that all the Scriptures from first to last centre about our Lord Jesus Christ, in His person and work, in His first and second coming, and hence that no chapter even of the Old Testament is properly read or understood until it leads to Him; and moreover that all the Scriptures from first to last, including every chapter even of the Old Testament, were designed for our practical instruction; Luke 24:27; 44; John 5:39; Acts 17:2,3; 18:28' 26:22, 23; 28:23; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11.

10. We believe that the Church is composed of all who are united by the Holy Spirit to the risen and ascended Son of God, that by the same Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, and thus being members one of another, we are responsible to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, rising above all sectarian prejudices and denominational bigotry, and love one another with a pure heart fervently: Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 2: 32-47; Rom. 12:5; I Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:20-23; 4:3-10; Col.2:14,15.

11. We believe that the Holy Spirit, not as an influence, but as a Divine Person, the source and power of all acceptable worship and service, is our abiding Comforter and Helper, that He never takes His departure from the Church, nor from the feeblest of the saints, but is every present to testify of Christ, seeking to occupy us with Him, and not with ourselves nor with our experiences: John 7:38,39; 14:16, 17; 15:26; 16:13, 24; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8,9; Phil. 3:3.

12. We believe that we are called with a holy calling to walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, and so to live in the Spirit that we should not fulfil the lusts of the flesh; but the flesh being still in us to the end of our earthly pilgrimage needs to be kept constantly in subjection to Christ, or it will surely manifest its presence to the dishonour of His name: Rom. 8:12, 13; 13:14; Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3: 1-10; I Pet. 1:14-16; I John 3:5-9.

13. We believe that the souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation do at
death immediately pass into His presence, and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the body at His coming, when soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in the glory; but the souls of unbelievers remain after death in conscious misery until the final judgement of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast in the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power: Luke 16:19-26; 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil.1:23; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 6:7; Rev.20:11-15.

14. We believe that the world will not be converted during the present dispensation, but is fast ripening for judgement, while there will be a fearful apostasy in the professing Christian body, and hence that the Lord Jesus will come in person to introduce the millennial age, when Israel shall be restored to their own land, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord; and that this personal and premillennial advent is the blessed hope set before us in the Gospel for which we should be constantly looking: Luke 12:35-40; 17:26-30; 18:8; Acts 15:14-17; 2 Thess. 2:3-8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 1:11-15.
NIAGARA BIBLE CONFERENCE'S LASTING INFLUENCE

The Niagara Bible Conference continued until 1897. The movement had begun to wane and discontinued meeting in Niagara-on-the-Lake for essentially two reasons: the first being theological. As with any movement the foundational beliefs are often the glue that holds the group together. Though the key doctrines regarding the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the personhood of the Holy Spirit and world missions remained intact there was, for some of the leadership, a shifting away from the theology of premillenialism and the immanent return of Christ to other views that were gaining popularity. This doctrine was the touchstone (Article 14) of the Niagara Creed in which the conservative branch of the church saw the need to unite against a common enemy, the apostatizing of the church by the liberals who wanted to still be named “Christian” but in the mind of the conservatives were not and to await the return of Christ for those who are “constantly looking”.

The second reason for its discontinuation was more practical. James Brookes was the driving force in keeping it both front and central through his leadership as president of the Niagara Bible Conference and through his magazine “Truth”. By reprinting messages by the leadership in the Truth magazine he kept this ever before his readership. Yet James Brookes died in 1897 and without his uniting leadership and passion the Niagara Bible Conference was discontinued or morphed into other areas.

Yet its influence was far reaching, not only in the creation of the Niagara Creed that would be used as a template for the Fundamentalist movement but those who taught at these conferences would themselves continue to give leadership in their respective spheres of influence. Scholars are somewhat agreed that the Niagara Bible Conference, though now silent, continued to reshape the church into what became, for positive or negative, the Fundamentalist branch of the Christian church. Its impact could be felt in especially three areas.

1) The primary purpose of the Niagara Bible Conference was “to lead earnest and enquiring souls into a deeper and more practical acquaintance with God's Word”. The leadership saw themselves not just as defenders of the truth but, like the Puritans, spiritual directors to and for the people. They believed that if they could take the historic truths of Protestantism, encapsulate them through systematic teaching and enable the followers to embrace these truths for themselves that they could stem the flow of the liberalization of the church and preserve its purity until Christ returns, which they believed was imminent The attendees were encouraged to bring a Bible, a notebook and a pen and to “study to show themselves approved unto God, workmen that need not be ashamed”. The conference, though not in isolation, gave rise to the Bible study movement with its love for studying the Bible.
2) With this emphasis on the study of the Bible came also the rise of the Bible college movement in which people could dedicate themselves for a set period of time to learn the Bible. The shift was away from classical studies towards more of a pragmatic, vocational program of study. They would be taught both Biblical theology in which they would study the actual texts and Systematic theology where they would explore the great doctrines in the Biblical context, yet always with a practical application to personal and corporate life. Notice how prolific the Bible college movement began to expand.

- A.J. Gordon, Boston Missionary Training School (Gordon College), 1889
- Toronto Bible College (Ontario Bible College), 1894
- Missionary Training Institute (Nyack College), 1892
- Training School of the Chicago Evangelization Society (Moody Bible Institute, 1886
- Johnson Bible Institute (Johnson Bible College), 1893
- Providence Bible Institute (Barrington College), 1900

3) The Niagara Bible Conference gave impetus to the faith missions movement, especially as embraced by J. Hudson Taylor, Jonathan Goforth, A.B. Simpson and others. Hear the words about Hudson Taylor from those days in 1888.

"A servant of the Lord whose light we had not heretofore seen," was the impression made at the Niagara Conference, where "his presence and words were so blessed as to make the occasion one of the most memorable in the lifetime of many a Christian worker." 1-

"The premillennial Advent is prominent," he wrote, "and the Word of God is honoured."

Mr. Taylor was only able to speak twice, having to pass on to Chicago for other meetings, but the impression made was profound. Personal love to the Lord Jesus as typified in the Song of Solomon, and faith in God (or the faithfulness of God, rather, upon which faith is to lay hold) were his subjects,
and he scarcely made any reference to China or the Mission.

For unexpected developments had taken place at the Niagara meetings after Mr. Taylor's departure. Disappointed at not hearing more from him on the subject of foreign missions, the Conference all the more welcomed the addresses of Mr. Radcliffe and Mr. Robert Wilder, for which the way had been well prepared. Burning words were spoken by the veteran evangelist and the young volunteer on the responsibility of each succeeding generation of believers to obey the great command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." He had learned, Mr. Wilder told them, the secret of how to work for the Lord twenty-four hours a day, and to keep on doing so all the year round. It was a lady who had made the discovery. When asked how it was possible "I work twelve hours here, she replied, "and when I have to rest, my representative in India begins her day, and works the other twelve."

"We want many from the Niagara Conference to work twenty-four hours a day like this," he urged. "Christian friends, you who cannot go, why not have your own representatives on the foreign field?"

This was a new idea, but seemed so reasonable that Mr. Radcliffe was kept busy answering questions as to how much it would take to support a worker in the China Inland Mission. Two hundred and fifty dollars a year (£50) he thought would suffice,1-{I This proved inadequate, however, as it made no allowance for incidental and travelling expenses, house rent, and the like.} and a meeting was appointed to see what was to be the practical outcome. Dr. W. J. Erdman was in the Chair, but the occasion was not one for much direction or control.

"After singing and prayer," he wrote, "the Secretary, who had in mind the general guidance of the meeting, suddenly found himself entirely emptied of every idea and preference, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon the believers present. The rest of the hour was filled with voluntary praises, prayers and consecration of young men and women to service in the foreign field. It was a meeting never to be forgotten, and money for the China Inland Mission came in without advertisement or urging on the part of any."

But even this experience was surpassed next day when the Conference reassembled. "As I reached the Pavilion," wrote Mr. Frost, to whom gifts and pledges of money sufficient for the support of two missionaries had been given the previous evening, "I found that people had become intoxicated with the joy of giving, and that they were seeking another opportunity for making free-will offerings for the Lord's work in China. A number were standing up, pledging themselves to give a certain amount toward the support of a missionary, and some were saying that they wanted to work
twenty-four hours a day by having a missionary all to themselves. Again promises and money came flowing in, until, this time, I had scarcely a place to put them. There I stood in the midst of the assembly-without ever wishing it or thinking such a thing could be-suddenly transformed into an impromptu Treasurer-of the China Inland Mission. And afterwards, upon counting what had been given, I found enough to support not two missionaries but actually eight, for a whole year, in inland China."

It is interesting to note that, in 1900, during the Boxer Revolution when the Chinese sought to remove all foreigners from their country that the China Inland Mission suffered the most from this conflict. There were 58 adults and 21 children murdered by these riots. In 1901, after the riots were quelled and foreign governments were requiring compensation for loss of both property and life Hudson Taylor chose not to seek any reparations from the Chinese government. He chose to leave it in the hands of God and continue to serve the Chinese as he had done for so many years. As Tertullian rightly stated when he declared that the church is built on the blood of its martyrs so also others stepped forward to offer themselves in the service of God to the China Inland Mission.
SUMMARY

The Queen's Royal Hotel has long disappeared from the landscape of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Unless one reads the historic plaques the significance of that sacred spot would be lost to the average tourist. Yet as the waters of the Niagara River seem to be absorbed into the waters of Lake Ontario, they are never really lost but become immersed into a reality greater than itself. The Niagara Bible Conference never really ceased to exist but became immersed into a larger reality as each participant, whether leader or student, took the key values which gave birth to the rising tides of Fundamentalism. This rising tide would continue to change the landscape yet its very existence owes its life and breath to the leaders and the students of the Niagara Bible Conference.
REFERENCES

3. Dick, Agnes – Archived in the National Library of Canada