

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

CHURCH UNION.

By Dr. J. M. Harper.

Article V.

In a previous article on the above topic, when referring to the objection against the proposals connected with a partial Christian Union on the plea that they did not go far enough, I was forced into saying, possibly a little too incautiously, that a wider union than that which was being contemplated by the Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians was a meantime impossibility—fully believing that there was no disposition on the part of the Anglicans or the Baptists, to take part in deliberations that had already reached a common ground of agreement. I even went so far as to say that the responsibility of proving that there is such a meantime impossibility in the way of a wider union rests with those who justify the steps that have already been taken towards a partial union. This task of proof, I claimed, would no doubt be undertaken "in extenso," if necessity demanded, before the laity had made up their minds on the details of the terms of the union that has already been under consideration by the Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians. And it may now be said that the courtesy of these three denominations, in inviting the Anglicans and Baptists to share in their deliberations on union, has imposed upon me or on others, sooner than was to be expected, the task of dealing with the difficulties in the way of an instant fuller Protestant Union than the one contemplated. My purpose in writing these articles was to examine the details of the terms of the partial union, in presence of my fellow-members of the Presbyterian Church, before dealing with the difficulties in the way of the wider union. But, now that an invitation has been issued to increase the number of negotiators, the details of the terms approved of by the Union Committee have to take a secondary place in the discussions to follow, with so much new ground to be gone over by the various sub-committees as well as the old.

The wisdom of the issuing of such an invitation, at such a juncture, has been seriously challenged, much as was challenged the neglect of including the Anglicans and Baptists in the deliberations on union from the beginning; and really, as far as one can well see, there is nothing of any great objective importance to come from that courtesy, save delay to the proposed partial union. And you, yourself, Mr. Editor, have very forcibly brought it home to us, that encouraged delay is as pernicious to a good cause as is inflamed haste. I am firmly of the belief that the wider the union the better it will be for an all-Canada; but I am just as firmly of the opinion that a partial union is the only step that is possible in the meantime, with very late events emphasizing in me that opinion. The purpose of these further articles of mine is twofold—first, to show—without the faintest prejudice in my mind against the very widest form of Christian Union—that there is a meantime impossibility in the way of organic union with our Anglican brethren; and, second, to show that the said impossibility need not stand in the way of such a union for all time.

There are several members of the Anglican communion who believe that the very widest Christian Union is a consummation devoutly to be wished for; just as there are very many more

who look upon a Protestant Christian Union as a possibility in sight. We have lately been made aware of the views entertained on union by such distinguished churchmen as the Rector of St. James Cathedral, Montreal, and the Archdeacon of Halifax. These divines have not been afraid to counsel their brethren to do what they can to preface the way for closer association with other denominations in the spread of the gospel. Yet we are just as well aware of the reception which their counsellings have been given by some of their Anglican brethren—one of whom openly accuses Dr. Symonds of having set the heather on fire, while another has been warning Dr. Armstrong against inconsistency and disloyalty towards Mother Church. Indeed Archdeacon Ker of Montreal has met his clerical neighbors' invitation to join with non-Anglican ministers of the gospel, in promoting church union with words such as these, which need no comment:

"Beyond the altogether human, temporary, and accidental, the Church of England will not, cannot go, even for such a desideratum as church union. From apostolic times, she inherits a deposit of doctrine and polity which she is bound to transmit, without addition and without loss, from generation to generation—the trust including (1) episcopacy and (2) the truths enshrined in the ancient creeds."

Nor is it necessary to emphasize, as Dr. Ker has further emphasized in his late sermon, what he says of union as a meantime impossibility to be overcome by a long period being set aside for further prayer and the exercise of patience. Indeed, the only union Dr. Ker, and possibly the vast majority of Anglicans, can venture to contemplate is one of absorption.

"Lasting union," he says, "when it comes, will be the work of men who believe intensely and who are devotedly loyal to their several denominations: not the work of a vain-glorious and unreflecting enthusiasm, nor yet of a wordy latitudinarianism, that, beyond the certainty of its own infallibility, believes nothing in particular."

And how glad must be the members of the Union Committee, who have so prudently and successfully formulated a creed and polity for the proposed new church, that they have had no hand in setting hearthstone on fire so unfittingly inflammable!

To avoid all such incendiary of argument, at least to prevent it from spreading into the camp of those who have already reached a common ground of agreement, it may be prudent to issue a gentle friendly challenge to the Rev. Dr. Ker and those of his clerical brethren who are of his way of thinking, as a test of what has so often been called "the church-pride of the Anglican." If the challenge be accepted, good and well; if it be ignored, then may the thesis, that there is a meantime impossibility in the way of a church union including the Anglicans, be looked upon as proven beyond a peradventure.

The proposed partial union of the Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians is no matter of a nine days' growth. As I have already said, the history of the movement in favour of union has so far shown neither haste nor lack of courtesy to anyone. Previous to the earliest proposal pointing to union, the three churches involved had been on the most neighbourly terms with one another. They were virtually waiting as units to be added to units.

The pastors of their respective congregations were never slow to occupy one another's pulpits, while the same pastors and their congregations were just as willing to stand shoulder to shoulder in any movement involving the general Christian advancement or the community in which they were placed. On the other hand, it is no prejudiced fault-finding to say that our Anglican congregations have been inclined to keep aloof, for the most part, from any such co-operation in any general united movement. Besides there has not been peace within the Church of England's own borders between Low Church partisanship and High-churchism. Even on the question of apostolic succession, the foundation, perhaps, of all Anglican church-pride—there have been Anglicans who have set it aside as a "mere figment." And everybody knows how nearly all our Anglican pastors have continued to look askance at any interchanging of pulpits with their Christian brethren of other denominations, as if such were not to be thought of. Indeed there never has been any assured evidence of Anglican bishops, priests, or deacons seeking any very intimate association with those whom many of them have been accustomed to call dissenters. And Dr. Ker is surely astray when he accuses his brethren of being too eager for union. Nay, he is all but undeniably correct when he says "the Anglican Church is not yet ready for it; that God's time for an Anglican union with other denominations has not yet come."

Now the question remains to be answered: Why has there been this aloofness on the part of the Anglicans? Is it all a church-pride or has such keeping apart been "beyond the altogether human, temporary, or accidental," of which Dr. Ker speaks? As far as I can make out, there is at least no official warrant for the disinclination to interchange pulpits, unless the instinct has arisen from a mistaken reading of the preface to the Anglican forms on ordination. Indeed, if Dr. Ker and all other Anglicans look upon that preface as being neither "human, temporary or accidental," and as one of the inheritances from apostolic times that has to be handed down "from generation to generation without addition and without loss," we need not go one step further to find the meantime impossibility that stands in the way of a wider union than the one already contemplated.

In fact, I have read over that preface most carefully, with the help of two well known Anglican divines, to find in it at least nothing to prevent an interchange of pulpits, whatever of a stumbling-block to union there may be in it; and to avoid even the appearance of discourtesy by a premature pressing of the argument while negotiations are pending. I would confine myself to the urging of that gentle friendly challenge on Dr. Ker and his fellow pastors which may be couched as follows:

If you are ready to offer, as you say you are, your contribution to the holy cause of union for which you have prayed so long and so earnestly, what is there to prevent you from encouraging an interchange of pulpits of a Sabbath day with those with whom you would be united, as a meet preparing of the way for the peace and communion which must precede actual union with the Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians?

Indeed, the acceptance of such a challenge by the Anglican Church at the present juncture would do much to prove to everybody that the movement towards the wider union is a real movement and not a mere make-believe; and, here, for the benefit of your readers, Mr. Editor,