

UNION OF THE CHURCHES :

SYMPOSIUM BY LAYMEN.

Many Ministers and Professors have already pronounced in the press and from the pulpit in favour of union. Indeed seldom has any important question been received with the same degree of unanimity. In order to elicit the views of prominent laymen a number were asked to contribute to a symposium on the subject. A few of the replies are quoted below :

Mr. James Croil, Montreal.

DEAR EDITOR:—In endeavoring to comply with your request for an expression of opinion from a layman's point of view respecting the proposed union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in Canada, I confess to a good deal of hesitation—not that there is the shadow of a doubt in my own mind as to the benefits that would be derived from it, but rather from a distrust in my judgment, lest I may have yielded too readily to the impulse of the moment and reached this happy state of mind without sufficiently considering the difficulties, real or imaginary, that have to be dealt with.

The few words I have to say refer chiefly to the organic union of the Presbyterians and Methodists, for Congregationalism is already so nearly allied to us, the transition would be a very easy one; indeed, the wonder is that we have not united long ago. But with respect to the Methodist it is somewhat different. There are divergences in this case that must be reckoned with before a satisfactory basis for union can be reached. Methodist "ways" differ in many particulars from Presbyterian usages, though I do not think they would prove insurmountable obstacles to union if approached in a spirit of mutual concession and in the exercise of Christian forbearance and charity.

Now that we are fairly face to face with this momentous problem, it will not be questioned that the things on which we are agreed are of much greater importance than those on which we differ. Speaking generally, there exists between the Methodist and Presbyterian churches substantial agreement as to the essential elements of Christian belief and fellowship. In regard to non-essentials, we are much nearer to each other than we were a few years ago. Neither of us has any right to say,—"We are the people and wisdom will die with us!" Each has much to learn from the other. The staid Presbyterian would be none the worse if inoculated with the evangelic fervour of the Methodist, and the emotional Methodist on the other hand, might derive benefit from a closer intimacy with his less demonstrative Presbyterian brother.

This subject in all its hearings has been so fully and frankly discussed in interdenominational conferences, in the church courts, in the pulpit and the press, and with such a surprising amount of unanimity and enthusiasm, in all parts of the Dominion, there is no reason to doubt that an organic union of these churches is desirable, and that it would be a distinct gain to our common christianity. It would be in accord with our Saviour's prayer that all who bear His name should be ONE. From a business point of view, it would conduce to economy in the administration of church funds and a

more satisfactory distribution of the effective working forces of the churches than exists at present; it would, by so much, lessen unseemly and hurtful denominational rivalry; and it would undoubtedly tend towards a higher standard of theological education than is attainable under present conditions.

When this union is consummated as it doubtless will be before long, it will furnish a note-worthy and much needed object-lesson to the churches of Christendom. May the Lord hasten it in His time!

JAMES CROIL.

Mr. John Cameron, of London.

Like most of those who have spoken or written on the subject, in the large I favor the union of the three churches named. I believe also it is practicable, and likewise that it will come. The onus of objection falls on those who oppose the prayer of Christ that they might all be one. As to practicability, it can be effected whenever a sufficiently large majority desire it to be practicable.

There's a wholesome wideness as well as essential agreement in the preaching of the three denominations named which shows that, doctrinally, the three bodies are not substantially apart. The differences of view as between the three denominations, are not greater than the differences between individual ministers and members of each denomination.

In polity, there is no real difference. The modern principle of local self-government runs through each—just as the same principle as really runs through government under the limited monarchy of Great Britain as under the republican forms of the United States.

In regard to usage, there would likely be some difficulty in adjusting the question of the itinerancy versus the idea of the settled pastorate. Here, again, the two sides are not as far apart as might at first be thought. The Methodists have had a little too much itinerancy, as shown by permissive legislation rendering longer pastoral periods possible. On the other hand, with Presbyterians and Congregationalists, "the settled pastorate" is by no means as settled as it sounds, if we take the actual facts as our guide. A middle way, including a good deal of the permissive and optional, ought to be within the powers of suggestion of men of common sense.

In considering this question of union, the prevalent public opinion of the mass of the laity must be taken into account, for as Phillip Brooks says, "the laity is the church." What has happened? Sabbath School Associations; Bible Society affiliations; W. C. T. U. co-operations; Y. M. C. A. organizations—with the laity, all these co-operations have acted as a solvent. The smaller ideas of differentiation have disappeared; only the larger fundamental things on which all agree stand out in bold relief. The laymen and women of the churches care now little for interdenominational differences; they will care for them less in the future. If there are those who think men and women of our modern age will ever fight again, as they fought of old, over small denominational differences, I can only say I think they are mistaken.

Certainly, there will be difficulties in the

way of church union. To define what is to be taught in the theological colleges of the United Church will require both largeness of mind and a plentiful supply of grace. It can only be settled, as Principal Caven wisely says, of the whole question, in an atmosphere of prayer.

Human nature being what it is, there will be an obstacle in the fear of those now in official position that their personal interests may suffer. I do not scorn this solicitude. Were I in their position, probably I too would be scanning the situation to see how my personal interests would be affected. All "vested rights" would need to be considered in a way to deal fairly by every individual, while conserving the interests of the United Church as a whole. But vacancies of one kind or the other would constantly occur through death and different causes. Time would adjust many temporary difficulties. The present men must receive full consideration. The new men must accept the new conditions, which in their case would include a wider field not alone of usefulness but of honorable distinction in their high calling.

The question of union has been raised in a manner that permits of neither evasion nor delay in consideration. It must be considered. If union is to be, let that be made plain at an early period. If it is not to be, equally important is it that consideration should not be deferred.

Perhaps the most useful contribution to the focussing of what has now become a matter of practical consideration, would be for the General Assembly to set apart two or three men like Principal Caven and Dr. Warden, for two or three months, to meet daily with men of similar standing from the other bodies.

If you ask my opinion, as a layman, I would say that union is bound to come; that such a union would be to the glory of God and the advantage of Canada; that the present state of public opinion in the subject is providential; and that neither our old-time denominational adjustments, nor our possible personal interests, should be permitted to stand in the way of the large achievement demanded by the present needs and conditions of the Dominion.

JOHN CAMERON.

Mr. A. F. Wood, Gladoc.

Editor Dominion Presbyterian: In reply to yours asking my views on the "proposed organic union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches," I have read most of the articles written in the Ontario papers on this subject which are largely in its favor. As I at present view it—I hold the following opinions.

1st As a matter of sentiment I believe much good can be effected by an organic union if it can be satisfactorily accomplished.

2nd But there are so many divergent views as to how it can be brought about that I have grave doubts as to its near accomplishment.

3rd That probably the more conservative element is in the Presbyterian body which in changes as to church polity moves slowly—you will remember that it took two meetings of the General Assembly to change the designation of the late Dr. Robertson from the "Convener of a Committee" to a "Superintendent of the Home Missions in the Northwest," and many thought there was more trouble as to the change of name from "Convener" to "Superintendent" than in regulating his duties. I merely mention this so as to show what we may expect.

4th There is no question of doubt that as