

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSEPISCOPACY AND CHURCH.
UNION.

One is not surprised that the Anglican Church insists upon the retention of the episcopacy. Many within its communion believe it to be of divine authority, just as many Presbyterians have held that their system has scriptural warrant above all others. Such persons could not conscientiously enter a union which broke forever the chain of "apostles" on which, according to their view, the right of a church to exist depends. Those who do not entertain this opinion naturally feel that it would be unwise, wrong and cruel to consummate any union which would exclude their fellow-churchmen and create a schism as wide as that which healed. In addition to this, the status of a bishop amongst Episcopalians has no parallel in our more democratic Presbyterianism. He is idealized. In him the church is personified. He is the vital part, the heart and brain of the body ecclesiastic. A halo has gathered around this venerable office which it wears not unbecomingly. It has survived the vicissitudes of the nation; the changing phases of social life; and the times of spiritual degeneracy when the "gates of Hades" had well nigh prevailed against the church of Christ. Our own tenacity, even in things unlovely, when our religious sentiments, affections and traditions are involved, should forbid us to reproach the Anglican when stipulating that bishops shall not be set aside—that the sacred entail of such a highly valued heritage shall not be broken. To concede this demand, and it must be conceded, decides that the form of the united church shall be Episcopal. Can Presbyterians make this concession? What principles are necessarily involved in that form of church government?

We have already seen that the doctrine of a personal succession of bishops is not contained, or even implied, in any Anglican symbol or ritual. The Archbishop of Canterbury may be, as far as his personal opinion goes, as good a Presbyterian as the Right Reverend the Moderator of the Church of Scotland. I am not sure but that Arch-bishop Taft was a case in point. He was none the less a true and loyal Anglican and a not unworthy occupant of the see of St. Augustine. The three functions which exclusively pertain to the bishop are his by immemorial custom and constitutional law, not necessarily by apostolic or divine institution, we may dispute this latter ground, and yet consistently concede the force of the former. These functions someone must perform and the church appoints the officer who shall do so. There are thousands of loyal churchmen who are sound Presbyterians on this point. We are already their brethren in spirit although not in the same communion.

The duties which, according to the Episcopal theory are exclusively performed by the bishop are Ordination, Confirmation and Spiritual Oversight of both clergy and laity, with the authority necessary to the discharge of such duties. Let us consider these from a Presbyterian standpoint.

(1.) The bishop alone may ordain to the ministry, but in the Church of England, every presbyter present has the right of laying his hands at the same time as the bishop lays on his. High Churchmen say that they thereby signify their concurrence, but their concurrence is not necessary if the ordina-

tion is purely Episcopal, nor is there any hint in the service that such a meaning is to be attached to an act in all respects identical with that of the bishop. It appears to be just as essential a part of the rite. In every ordination some one must offer the ordination prayer and invoke the divine blessing on the kneeling candidate, and also take the initiative in the manual act. With us the presbytery appoints the presiding officer for each occasion and it is always felt to be most fitting that he should be the moderator, if possible. The president of conference performs the same duty in the Methodist church. If we regard the bishop, as all are free to regard him, as simply presiding presbyter, "first among equals," then an Anglican ordination is as distinctly a "laying on of the hands of the presbytery" as any similar ceremony among ourselves. There is nothing in the ordinal to indicate that the hands of the "priests" are not as necessary to the validity of orders as those of the bishops.

(2.) So deeply is the need of such a service as that of Confirmation felt that it, or an excellent substitute for it, has been adopted by the majority of our own ministers, and the General Assembly has sanctioned a series of questions to be put to the catechumens on the occasion. Richard Baxter wrote a treatise in advocacy of confirmation, denouncing its neglect in his time. Matthew Henry sought it at the hands of a bishop and writes beautifully of his edifying experience. The Lutheran and Reformed churches of the continent never discontinued the rite, and it is administered, as with us, by the pastor. If, has not, we think, any scriptural authority, but it is abundantly warranted by general principles and Christian experience. The only point in dispute with our Anglican brethren is, Should catechumens be confirmed by the pastor or by the bishop? If permission were given to the pastor to admit to the communion, for adequate reasons which would be specified, those who had not yet been confirmed, I can see many reasons for deferring the formal admission until the regular visit of the representative of the corporate body of which the individual church is a part. The bishop's visit would take the character of a formal enquiry into the spiritual condition of the church, the general efficiency of the various departments of its activity and the fidelity of all the office-bearers to their trust. Such an occasion would furnish an inspiring demonstration of the solidarity of the church, and would never be forgotten by the young people who were at the time confirmed. We have our presbyterial visitations, and there is abundant testimony to the good results when faithfully carried out, would not an Episcopal visitation be productive of as much good? Is not the subject one which we can at least discuss with our Episcopal brethren with good hope of coming to an amicable finding?

(3.) To the bishop belongs the chief oversight of the churches in accordance with the canons of his diocese. He is not an arbitrary, but a constitutional ruler. Such an officer is no novelty among Presbyterians. The Lutheran church has its superintendents, which, in the Scandinavian churches of that communion, are actually called bishops. The Church of Scotland also had its superintendents in the post-reformation days, and we have revived the office

in connection with the oversight of our extensive home mission fields. The marked success of the last named ought to ally much of our prejudice against a "pastor of pastors." In every free society some men come to the front as "born leaders." Dr. Rainy of the United Free Church, like others before him, wielded a greater influence than any bishop, but without constitutional status or responsibility. I submit that it is a question open to debate whether a church's leaders should be chosen by the operation of the forces and influences which now bring them to the front, or whether they should be duly elected and clothed with a legitimate authority to be employed with full personal accountability for the consequences of their actions. Excellent as our Presbyterian system is there are two evils which have become increasingly manifest, namely, the government of the church by committees, and the weak sense of a personal responsibility anywhere for the decisions arrived at. I frankly confess that, to my mind, the church would be much benefited by placing the executive authority in the hands of one competent man, clothing him with appropriate dignity, and making him feel that the church looked to him to see that all its affairs were carried on in accordance with its constitution and authorized modes of procedure, he being responsible, like the bishops of the Church of Scotland, to a General Assembly or Synod. The appointment of such an officer in every synod, call him by what name you please, would locate responsibility for initiation of procedure; ensure prompt action in emergencies, unify the activities of the church, and promote their harmonious co-operation; elevate the standard of parochial efficiency; and furnish a representative official for the church in its relations to other churches and civil authorities. We now answer our question: "Can Presbyterians consistently concede an Episcopal constitution to the United Church?" by saying that there is no barrier in that system to our entering hopefully into negotiations with a view to organic union. Its prominent features bear a Presbyterian interpretation: much in it has already received the approval of our own and other Reformed Churches; and must we not acknowledge that a union of the two ecclesiastical units would prove the truth of the old paradox that one plus one is often more than two?

My next letter will discuss the question of Clerical Orders and Church Union.

PACIFICUS

THE UNION QUESTION.

Paris, Ont., July 20th, 1907.

Editor The Dominion Presbyterian:

The editorial you quote from the Chicago Interior on Church Union in Canada was corrected by a correspondent in that paper. It is unfair because it is based upon wrong information as to the vote at Montreal, and it is unwise because it proceeds to pelt with epithets those who are opposed to the proposed union. If this kind of thing keeps up the Presbyterian Church will soon decide to go on with the great work God has committed to her, instead of wasting more time on useless and disturbing discussions.

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