

## Our Contributors.

### UNION OF CHURCHES.

There were, in the days of the apostles, two great divisions or sections of the church: the Jewish and the Gentile. There was, in some aspects, as distinct and wide a divergence between these two great divisions of the church then, as between the two great divisions now—the Protestant and the Roman Catholic. The "Catholic" says, "Oh, it is all right to believe in Jesus, but then you must believe in the Virgin and the Saints, and in the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass." Just so the Jewish Christians said to the Gentile believers, "You are right in believing in Jesus Christ; you must also be circumcised, and keep the laws of Moses."

Now, what did the apostles? Did they recognize the two divisions, and formulate a constitution for each? Nothing of the kind! They did not recognize them as being two, but *one*. In so far as they held Christ as the head, they pronounced them right; in so far as they divided themselves from one another, they pronounced them wrong!

What about doctrine? Difficulties on this point were referred to the apostles. The Corinthian church wrote to Paul, respecting difficulties that had occurred to them, as to doctrine and church administration. And all the churches had the privilege of being instructed by the inspired apostles. They had the Old Testament Scriptures—more or less of the words of our Saviour in some of the gospels—and, as I have said, the living apostles; and they needed no more. The only attempt at "council" or "conference" was at Jerusalem. (1) That was a gathering of inspired men. They said, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." No gathering of Christian men has, ever since, had a right to announce their decisions as being the decision of the Holy Ghost. (2) It was an appeal—mainly on a matter of fact—from Gentile Christians to the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem. Paul had taught at Antioch that the Gentile believers were not bound to obey the ceremonial law of Moses. Brethren from Judea said they were; and no doubt asserted that the apostles and elders at Jerusalem were of the same

mind—and the meeting at Jerusalem was convened to make a deliverance on this point.

So completely did councils, to settle faith and practice, drop out of sight, that there were no more of them for a hundred years. Mosheim says, "There are no vestiges of ecclesiastical councils, till the middle of the second century." Gibbon says substantially the same: "The useful institution of provincial synods took their rise in Greece, in the second century."

Then, what were the bonds, all this time, of unity of faith and oneness of being, among the large and increasing number of local churches holding Christ? This: First, the living apostles to instruct them; next, after the apostles' death (and they left no successors), the *inspired writings of the Apostles*, which are to us in lieu of (and in succession to), the living apostles.

What about mutual consultation and sympathy? Well, see how they did for the poor saints at Jerusalem—how the whole Gentile world (as far as that world was Christian), gathered money, and sent sympathy to them. How Antioch laid its ordaining hands on its two best and most cherished preachers—Saul and Barnabas—and sent them off as missionaries. How the Christians at Ephesus sent letters with the apostles to introduce them to the church at Corinth. How travelling or missionary Christians, everywhere, found welcome and sympathy from other Christians.

The first occasion for sects—not as respects doctrines differing from the majority, but as bodies of Christians separate from the majority, and disowned by them—was when Christianity was "established" by Constantine. From that time forward, the Catholic church, so called, became intolerant, and those divisions began, which have since so rent the mantle of Christ. For it naturally followed, that if no divergence of opinion on points of doctrine or practice were "allowed," then those holding such divergent views, must be "dissenters."

Unfortunately, the example of the State superintending and guiding the religious life of the nation, was copied and followed in the times of the Reformation; and the occasion, and the necessity for "dissent," or for diverse religious bodies, continued to exist, as before.

What is to be done? We must do as they did,