

The Enthusiasm for Union in Scotland

(By Rev. Thomas Gilleson, Parish Church of St. Bride, Edinburgh, formerly of Vancouver, B. C.)

NOTE: Those concerned in Church Union in Canada will welcome this readable impression of the Union situation in Scotland—where, however, conditions are different. Though farther away from Vancouver than most of the earlier teachers, graduates, and some Board members of Westminster Hall, to whom this Magazine gave publicity in other years, Mr. Gilleson, as a teacher in and graduate of that College, has repeatedly demonstrated that he retains interest in this Magazine—of which he foresaw the possible development in service. (Ed. B. C. M.)

To one who was privileged to be present in both assemblies, that of the Church of Scotland and of the United Free Church, it is not difficult to estimate the atmosphere and feeling that animated those bodies.

A hush of expectancy fell over the U. F. Brethren at the conclusion of the moderator's eloquent opening prayer. Men had been drawn very close to the Holy of Holies. Earthward things began to fall away and lose their exaggerated magnitude. The spirit of man seemed for a moment to rise on the wings of prayer into the divine presence and glimpse things in something of their true proportions.

Dr Drummond presented a quiet, compressed, informative statement, largely of a historical nature, looking back over 16 years of negotiations and then forward a little. He reminded his hearers how the Act of 1921 dealt with the powers of the Church in spiritual matters and how the Bill (since become an Act on 25th May, 1925) at present before Parliament, sought to provide for the settlement of the temporalities of the Church—both of them Enabling Acts only, i.e., putting into the hands of the two contracting Churches powers, full powers to order their own house in all affairs concerning belief and practice and finance.

The reply of that redoubtable champion of free speech and opinion, was most modest and moderate, James Marr, M.P. Parliament has changed and modified this boiling spirit. The old song was sung—that these were national moneys and did not belong to any church to do with as they would, that the proceedings were contrary to the Act of Union between England and Scotland, and as a consequence invalid. The audience listened patiently, although indeed they knew it already like the pages of a well-thumbed book.

The whole debate was restrained and marked by deep earnestness and intensity. Men felt that the hour for action had come, that Union was very near. No one was surprised that a substantial majority rose to approve the proceedings of the committee who watch the case for Union.

The Church of Scotland held a private meeting the evening before this debate. The moderator of assembly, Dr. White, who is also convener of the "Union" Committee (so-called, for the proper name is The Committee Appointed to Confer with the United Free Church) introduced proceedings in an informative and witty speech. Indeed, he again and again invited questions. He and his vice convener, J. A. S. Miller, W.S., were there to meet the interrogations of the House and obviate delay and waste of time the following day. To some intent this purpose was served. In both assemblies it was noted with gratitude and pride how much in prestige and pocket the Church of Scotland was sacrificing in this whole movement toward union. On one item alone the old Church abandons a claim to £60,000 per annum. The U. F. Church is assumed into the Union with a debt of £250,000 (quarter of a million pounds sterling) hanging over her churches and manse.

Scots discuss material things with a fine grace, with a grace that savours of spirituality, with a consciousness that all things are holy and that somehow, in the eyes of God, the distinction between the sacred and the secular does not and never did exist, because both are contributing to life.

Many eyes have been on Canada and a fine tribute and benediction was pronounced over the Great West for wisdom in this vital matter of Union. Essential unity we have already—what we want is Union, a united front, the principle of the Single Command, to go shoulder to shoulder into the field against evil and error. That was stated to be the high and holy purpose of Union, which none could withstand or confute. This we must choose ere the purposes of God cast us to one side or ride over us as narrow, worthless factionaries.

Wide-eyed wonder mingled with pity greeted the hour-and-a-half speech of that famous obstructionist, Dr. Mitchell, of Killearn. To those in touch with the needs of the world it sounded like blar-

ing brass or a clanging cymbal. It was beating the air. Here too the majority in favour was overwhelming. If Union is a fait accompli, as it may well be, in a matter of three years' time, there will be no split and no secession. The times are too serious and menacing. Such an effervescence of energy is unthinkable.

Scotland faces two dangers—the impatience and consequent attrition of her Presbyterian Church membership through the needless and senseless standing apart of two units of Christ's Church that the process of history has already made one. The younger generation have no taste or flair for the disputes that agitated their grandparents. The gravamen of their interest is removed from the old niceties of doctrine and administration. Scotland is stripping to the waist to fight the devil.

The second danger that is bidding the Church close their ranks and unite is the invasion and advance of the Roman Church in her midst. In West Scotland the majority of the people are Irish and Roman Catholic. In such a severely

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