

UNION—ITS PRINCIPLES AND TERMS.

In our last number we considered at some length the hinderances which lie in the way of our union with the United Presbyterian Church, and how these might without much difficulty be overcome. We also took a survey of the differences which unquestionably may be found between us on matters pertaining to the duties and responsibilities of the civil magistrate, and endeavoured to show that, after all, they amounted to little, and ought not to be bars to our incorporated fellowship. The more we think out these debatable questions, the more are we convinced of the duty and desirableness of Union. We cannot, for our own part, start a good reason why we should not be one Church. If any one tells us about differences we say that the same, or like differences, may be found among the members of either body, and yet these do not disturb their harmony, or hinder their Church activity. It is amazing how much brethren tolerate in one another, and with what complacency they can listen to the statement of opinions opposed to their own, by ministers of their own fellowship. What can be more convincing than this, that there is a pre-disposition for unity on a broad and generous basis, with a tolerance of opinions that do not affect the foundations of the faith, and are too nice and subtle for very clear or intelligible definition?

We cannot overlook the fact that we are in danger of being too particular in our terms on both sides. There are no great and broad questions to handle—no large and disputed territory to survey and divide, to give up or to claim; hence, having so few points to settle, and these, too, reduced to a minor minimum indeed, we are apt in these circumstances to be too fine in our discriminations and too particular in our mutual desiderata. If a man has a hundred gallons of liquid to divide he is not very particular about drops or g'asses, even pints may pass without observation; but if there be but a few drops to be parted between two or three persons there needs the nicest handling and discrimination, lest there should be inequality or loss. So in like manner we, having comparatively small matters to debate about and to determine, are perhaps exposed to the temptation of being very keen and very particular. It will be well for both Churches if they cherish and cultivate large and generous conceptions of Church unity and fellowship, and avoid that too acute analytic which creates doubtful differences, and that microscopic examination which magnifies particles, it may be of precious dust, into ingots of gold. Into such faults and follies the best and wisest minds do sometimes fall, as the past history of the Church abundantly testifies. From such temptations and sins we pray that God may deliver us.

Some of our readers may not be quite familiar with the three "Articles" which the joint committee reported this year to our respective Synods; we therefore reprint them, as a foot-note, to aid in the more intelligent consideration of this question.* It will be seen that the *first* pertains to the "Headship of Christ over

* ARTICLES OF UNION.

I.—OF THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST.—"We maintain that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of his Church; that the laws by which she is to be governed are contained only in the inspired Scriptures; that Christ hath made her free from all external or secular authority in the administration of her own affairs; and that she is bound to assert and defend this liberty to the utmost, and ought not to enter into any such engagements with any party whatsoever, as would be prejudicial to it."

II.—LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.—"We maintain that 'God is the only Lord of the conscience,' and that therefore every person ought to be at full liberty to 'search the Scriptures' for himself, and to follow out what he conscientiously believes to be the teaching of Scripture, without let or hindrance. But if any person, under the plea of liberty of conscience, presumes to disturb the peace of society, or to set aside the lawful authority of the magistrate, or to blaspheme the name of God openly and wantonly, or to disturb the public religious worship of his neighbour, we declare that these are abuses, which the magistrate ought to repress, both for the glory of God and the public weal."