

TRACTS BY CANADIAN LAYMEN.

NO. 3.

CATHOLIC UNITY.

"I believe in the Holy Catholic Church,"—"One Catholic and Apostolic Church." Every Sunday, at least, we repeat these solemn words of the ancient creed; they express our belief in the continued existence of CHRIST'S Church, Holy, Apostolic, Universal, and United, even in these days of dissension and schism.

In the fullest sense of the words, we can only apply them to the band of faithful or baptized followers of our LORD, who are Christians not merely in name, but in heart and life. They are scattered abroad throughout the visible Church; they hold the faith in all its apostolic fullness; and they are united in CHRIST, renewing that union whenever they approach His Altar.

But is there any wider meaning in which the description, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, and United, can be applied to the Church as it is? Or may these words express an ideal, in part obscured, to the resuscitation of which we may look forward with confidence? It is here proposed to answer this question, so far as the qualifications of Unity and Catholicity are concerned.

It is important at the outset to remember that even in Apostolic times the word "church" had two distinct meanings, as referring to any single congregation of Christians, or as embracing the whole body of the faithful everywhere; while by "the visible Church" is plainly signified the entire body of those who have been regenerated by the HOLY SPIRIT through the Sacrament of Baptism; and that is the Church of the creeds. In this broad and Catholic definition, we possess an essential element of unity, by Baptism into one Body; while this unity is perpetuated by the constant participation of the Bread which came down from Heaven, inasmuch as we, though many, are declared by S. Paul to be one on this very account.

And here may be noted that they who make light of schism, are consistent in ignoring the operation of the major sacraments, and in denying the existence of the minor, and in applying to