

about the chaff! We ought all to feel thankful that the Secession subtleties of a bygone age have been merged in the crucible of denominational amalgamation, and are almost vanished away; and if the antiquaries of a distant age should ever disinter them from their sepulchral resting-places, it will require all the skill and sagacity of future Hugh Millers and Murchisons to discriminate between the distinct, but not easily distinguished, species of the polemical megatheriums of a former age. Of the blessings which flow from an arrangement by which brethren, who had previously "become two bands," are enabled to dwell in perfect unity, the comparatively recent junction between the two Synods which constitute the United Presbyterian Church affords a marked and memorable illustration. It is acknowledged by all the ministers and members of both parties, that the standard of piety, the zeal, the love, the generosity, the comfort of all concerned have, without a single drawback, been increased in a higher ratio than the most sanguine advocates of the measure had contemplated or foretold. None of the members of either denomination have ever repented of their joint determination, or would now wish to retrace their steps.

There are not a few benefits of a more practical and palpable nature, on which it may be proper that I should briefly dwell. One College at Edinburgh would be quite sufficient for the wants of the united bodies. One board of management would preside over their temporal concerns, so that a large sum would be saved for missionary purposes, both at home and abroad, or be devoted to the furtherance of spiritual objects. But the most important advantage of all (as was most forcibly and seasonably remarked by our accomplished friend, Dr. Andrew Thomson,) would be the consolidation (in what he justly termed over-churches districts) of two or more weak congregations into one, by which the income of the ministers who presided over it would reach a respectable amount, and, in each case, one or more useful labourers be released from a discouraging and uncomfortable position, and transferred to other localities, where their presence would be more highly prized, and their labours more adequately remunerated; whilst the hearers, when the process of fusion had taken place instead of being often alienated, and the strictness of discipline impaired, by occasional jealousies and rivalships, would be strengthening each other's hands and encouraging each other's hearts, under the holy and healing influence of Christian confidence and Christian love. These advantages can, at the best, be but faintly and feebly realised by an occasional interchange (it may be, at distant periods) of social meetings, or pulpit ministrations. The fellowship between ministers, office-bearers, and members of different denominations, stands in much the same relation to that which prevails amongst brethren belonging to one communion, which the feelings of well-bred courtesy existing between common acquaintances bears to the daily and delightful converse enjoyed by intimate friends. In the one case, the mutual regard is slight and superficial; in the other, it is intimate, cordial, and unreserved.

Allow me to refer, for a few moments, in illustration of this principle, to the era of the Heptarchy. When England was, at that period, invaded by a foreign enemy, it of course was possible, though by no means certain, that the seven separate kingdoms might combine their forces to resist Danish or Norman aggression; it might happen, however, also, that some of them would remain neutral,—that others would be lukewarm or unsteady,—and that a few

might even become the allies, instead of being the antagonists, of the invading enemy. But ever since these separate principalities have been auspiciously consolidated into one, all the ancient distinctions have been wholly obliterated, and in attachment to the interests of their common country, there is no difference, but, on the contrary, a complete identity, both of feelings and of interests, between the men of Wessex and those of Mercia. Notwithstanding the affinity which subsisted between the natives of England and Scotland in point of language, habits, and character, how much jealousy, discord, and estrangement subsisted between them, as long as they remained disunited, whilst the intervals of concord or co-operation were few and far between! What is true of these two rival kingdoms, in their state of isolation, when under separate sovereigns, or even separate Parliaments, holds good of our Presbyterian Churches, so long as they are governed by distinct synods and distinct presbyteries. But if we were perfectly joined together, in form as well as in spirit, so as to constitute one great "National Free Church" all invidious or jarring distinctions would at once fall to the ground, and be for ever swept away. The United Presbyterian Ephraim would never again vex the Free Church Judah, and, after the lapse of a very few years, it would (as is already the case in regard to the two bodies which now constitute the United Presbyterian Church) be impossible for any one to guess, whether any particular minister or elder had formerly belonged to one communion or to the other.

Far be it from me to depreciate, or to discourage, a work of piety and labour of love, in which many distinguished and devoted believers have, from the most praiseworthy motives, been engaged. It has, however, always appeared to me, that the advantages arising from an Evangelical Alliance, in virtue of which certain members of the different communions meet together for a brief season and at distant intervals, are limited and evanescent, when compared with the more palpable and permanent blessings derived from a scriptural incorporation of various sections of the church into one. Although the proceedings of a society instituted on such a basis tend greatly to promote the reciprocal feelings of Christian fellowship and mutual esteem amongst the respected individuals who are present at such meetings, and may often tend to assuage the asperities, or sometimes to prevent the outbreak, of polemical gladiatorialship, and is the best, and perhaps sole scheme for creating such a relation between Christians whose views of church government and discipline are incompatible and irreconcilable, it has only "a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things" which may be expected to grow out of such a close and intimate union as I venture to advocate at this time. In the year 1738,* towards the close of the reign of the Emperor Charles VI., many officers in the service of the multifarious sovereigns of Germany felt considerable dissatisfaction at the estrangement and isolation which subsisted between their respective corps, and resolved to form a "military alliance," the members of which, by mutual converse and social communion, might either remove, or at all events diminish, the tendencies to jealousy and discord which, in a greater or less degree, prevailed amongst them. They accordingly held three successive meetings at Heidelberg, Hildesheim, and Hildburghausen,—as to the two last of which, I am not in possession of any particulars; but the first was very numerous and respectably attended.

* The reader need not look for any further particulars of this event in any history of the epoch, whether special or universal.