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THE PRESBYTERS STAND PAT —NO UNION!

*It is Not a Matter of Doctrine or
Church Government, but of Affection*

By BRITTON B. COOKE

THE first to enter was an old man. He was white and bent, but something in the way he clutched his umbrella suggested stubborn vigour still burning in him. He appeared at the corner of King and Simcoe Streets. He looked up at the grimy turrets of new St. Andrew's with a faded eye. He climbed the steps impatiently and disappeared within the doors of the church.

The second was an old woman, well-dressed, with a ruddy face, and large Bible under one arm.

The third was an ex-Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario.

The fourth was a preacher with a long neck and a sallow complexion. He looked as though he had just bolted a few heavy works on theology and was hurrying to the next intellectual feast.

The fifth was a large, round preacher, bearded and of dignified mien.

Then they began to come in dribbles and small crowds and I could take no more note of details. Finally, I, too, climbed the steps and passed over the fibre-matting which the heathen make for nothing but church vestibules, passed the crimson-coloured doors that swing at the ends of the aisles, and breathed once more the atmosphere of old carpets and last Sunday's perfumes. In short, I attended the first session of the Presbyterian Anti-Church Union Congress.

There, in the soft light of the church, stood the little company of militant Scotch Presbyterians of Canada. There in the preaching box was a large, scholarly man, in the robes of the Ministry, uttering rolling sentence after rolling sentence, broken here and there by flashes of irony, and epigrammatic argument against Church Union and Church Unionists. The meeting was quiet. There were no passionate outbursts. In the faces of a few of the men was that quiet, calm-eyed defiance that makes even the unholy One himself afraid of the Scotch.

And then we sang. First the distant playing of the choir organ, then a sort of heave of sound as the great organ launched the tune. The old man next me faltered and then picked up the metre with a tune of his own—it must have been his own. Then the full body of sound from the assembled throats caught up to the organ and the two swept on together through the familiar stanzas of the hymn. There was no mistaking that kind of singing. Methodists would have sung it like a love song. Anglicans would have romped it. Congregationalists would have done it in any number of ways except the Scotch Presbyterian way. For they made of it, not a tune, but a picture of that inextinguishable something which is called Scotch Presbyterianism. It had the rhythm of slow seas sweeping heavily up out of the ocean to be dashed against some far-off stubborn coast. It was as sonorous as a gale snoring in the undergrowth of the north woods. Listening to that hymn one might have been led into thinking: this is the tune of Scotch Presbyterianism. It is a thing which cannot be put in words and which cannot be wiped out by adversities or persecutions or General Assemblies. One felt that it was heroic, significant of courage, tenacity and serene determination—

BUT, looking 'round, there was not to be seen in all that gathering a young man. It was indeed a meeting of the presbyters, the elderly men, fired by the love of the Church that has been more to Scotland than kings or parliaments, moved by their affection for what was old and tested as against what was new and untested, and pricked by a natural and almost praiseworthy sense of resentment against the younger churches—the Methodists and the Congregationalists—whose foundation can NOT be traced back to the third and the fourth chapters of

Exodus, and who, by one step are to be admitted to full parity with this old Calvinistic body. It was a magnificent gathering of a sort of religious Tories. These men, one could imagine, felt themselves the custodians in Canada of the great Protestant religious tradition, the tradition of Presbyterianism which everywhere in Europe fought Episcopacy. Theirs is the same tradition that gave France the National Protestant Church and lent strength to the Huguenots in the days of oppression. Theirs is the same tradition the Netherlands took from France; that furnished half the inspiration of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists; and was to Scotland what Magna Charta was to the English, what the Declaration of Independence was to the Americans, and, in some measure, what the breaking up of the Family Compact and its associations was to Canada. After all, traditions are worth something, and it was because George Brown was a Presbyterian that he fought against church establishment in Canada, and won. Looking at this gathering of Scotch-Canadian Presbyterians, therefore, one felt the heroism of their position. But seeing how few were the young men in the gathering, one felt, too, the pathos of the thing. To resist Church Union, not on doctrinal grounds, and not on any really serious point with regard to church government, such a movement must at least have Youth as its ally. And it hasn't youth.

I MET, one evening last week, one of the noblest of these anti-unionists, and he talked to me freely and boldly as was becoming in a man who knew what he believed and was unconcerned who denied it. I quote him, not to cast doubt on the rightness of his argument, but merely to report one side of the case before reporting the other. There is no finer type of man anywhere to be found than this Scotch-Canadian sort, in whom there is that rare balance of healthy body with healthy brain so fine in these neurotic times. The very stubbornness with which he held his views was magnificent.

"Speeches?" he exclaimed. "Did ye say they failed to convince ye? Quibbles and hair-splitting was it? Well . . . ye are right. There's nothing that a Methodist believes, or a Congregationalist believes, that I can't stomach pretty well m'self. I don't quarrel with them on a matter of doctrine."

A pause.
"And I don't dispute very much about the way of running the church. So long as it's not episcopacy—so long as it's done decently and in order I can abide whatever form the United Church of Canada has cooked up—"

Another pause.
"But I belong to a church with a great history, and a great name, an' it's beyond me t' see why I sh'd abandon it. Mind, I don't deny the Methodists a great name and the Congregationalists. But I say, let them keep theirs and let me keep mine."

"But you cannot hope to prevent the United Church coming into being?"

"No."

"And great numbers of Presbyterians will join it?"

"Ye're wrong there. There'll be great numbers of people leave the Presbyterian Church to join the United Church, but not Presbyterians. They'll be the people who chose their church by accident—or

because they liked the preacher, or because their girls get int' the choir, or because it was handy, 'r fashionable. Ye ken the people I mean. They aren't Presbyterians. They'd be Anglicans if it wasn't for the prayers they'd have to learn. Or they'd be Methodists if it wasn't for the style that Methodists put on and

the rules against card-playing and dancing. But they don't know even the meaning of Presbyterian and they've no more interest in Scotland than I have in the people of Siam.

"Let them have their United Church. They're good people. I wish them no ill."

TWO days later I met the other side of the case, a young clergyman, six years out of Knox College. He was one of that age and that type I had not seen at the meetings of the anti-unionists.

"I believe in efficiency," he said, crisply. "I do not undervalue traditions. But I accept the view of those who believe we have reached the time when we must drop the particular details of our respective traditions, and combine the best in all of them. The work before the churches of this country in the next decade is, as everybody knows, colossal. The Presbyterian Church in Scotland made a great name for itself by fighting for the freedom of the common worshipper. The Methodist Church and the Congregational churches have had their problems and their victories. But the point is this: they have finished their particularist work, so far at least as Canada is concerned. The vigilance of the Presbyterian Church is no longer required to protect our spiritual independence as it was in Scotland. The evangelism of the Methodist Church has evangelized the other churches—we accept their views on personal religion. The Congregational Church has emphasized the necessity of democracy in religious organization. The particular needs which gave these churches their raison d'être, no longer exist in Canada. On the other hand, the evils of duplication among them are obvious to everyone. If we are to regard the future rather than the past—and that, I think, is our duty—then we must have the Union."

Needless to say, this young preacher is a student of higher criticism and sociology. He has views on Canadian politics and on most of the great questions that face this country. One could feel that though he might not be a great respecter of traditions, he was at least a great student of the future and its needs. And one who is likely to be a service to this country.

"Are you Scotch?" I asked.

"No," he retorted, "Canadian."

But this much I knew: his father and his mother, and his grandparents before that again came from near Peter Head. He carried no hyphens, however honourable.

ONE other man should be quoted in this connection. He was a returned soldier, one who, this day, had been wounded in Flanders, and had limped down to St. Andrew's from the Convalescent Hospital in old Knox College. He had been sitting for some time in the back of the church, where the meetings were held, and I noted him for a Scotch-Canadian. Leaving the meeting, we had this conversation:

"Are you for it or against it?" I asked.

"I'm against the anti's," he said.

"And your reasons?"

"Too many to tell."

"Has the war anything to do with it?"

"It has everything to do with it."

We boarded a street car and he unfolded his point of view.

"I used to be a theological student at Knox," he said, "but I enlisted when the war started—third