

Bellarmino's definition of the Church with the exception of the last clause, which requires submission to the Roman Pontiff. They even teach that the undivided Church was infallible, or practically infallible, until it became fallible by committing ecclesiastical suicide, when it divided itself into its eastern and western sections.

There are also not a few Protestants who, when they deal with the reunion of Christendom, appear to halt between two opinions. They see clearly that the Church is no longer to be found in any one visible organization. The visible Church is divided. But when they reason about reunion they seem insensibly to slide into the Romish conception of the Church, and argue as if the body which is divided is identical with that whose unity is proclaimed in the Word of God, to which pertain the promises.

These varying conceptions of the Church and its unity affect very directly the views which we cherish in reference to Church union.

II. Church unions in relation to the idea of the Church. 1. The Romish idea of the Church clearly bars, so far as Roman Catholics are concerned, all thought of union with other Churches. The Church is held to be one and indivisible; and there can be no union because the unity of the Church has never been broken. If the Church which Jesus Christ founded upon a rock is a visible corporation, made up of all sorts of men, reprobates included, it exists somewhere in tangible form. Its unity is unquestionable, and its perpetuity sure. It is the one Church of Christ. Separated religious communities are only branches broken off from the living tree. The tree retains the life and the separated branches are withered and dead. It is easy to understand why the Roman Inquisition has forbidden Roman Catholics to pray for the reunion of Christendom. Such prayers ignore her claim that the entire Church of Christ, to which salvation belongs, is comprised within the Papal fold. It should be noted that this stupendous claim, which Rome desires to impose on the world, is the logical outcome of her false and earthly view of the Church. Common sense has occasionally asserted itself even in the Church of Rome, and, in spite of logic, there have been repeated attempts made by the highest ecclesiastical authority in that body to effect a union with the Greek Church, and a basis of agreement was definitely reached at the Council of Florence in 1439, from which, however, the Greeks withdrew, and the Uniate Churches were admitted into the communion of Rome, preserving their own forms of creed, with the *filioque* clause omitted, retaining their ancient rites and the use of the cup at the Lord's supper. Distinguished divines, moreover, like Spinola and Bossuet, with the private sanction of the reigning Pontiff, entered into negotiations with Protestants to secure a reunion of western Christendom.

The bearing of the Protestant idea of the Church on Union includes in its widest range the whole sacramental host of God's elect; all who have been, all who are, and all who shall be gathered into one under Christ, the Head thereof. It is the mystical body of Christ. Its members, in whatsoever nationality or ecclesiastical organization they may be found, are so united that they necessarily constitute one body in all ages. Christ dwells in each of them by His Holy Spirit, and each of them, as a result of the Spirit's grace, abides in Christ by faith. This union is indissoluble and eternal. For the members of Christ's mystical body "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter i. 5). He who founded the Church on a rock has declared in reference to all his believing people, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John x. 28). The members of Christ's mystical body are not only made one with Christ by the bonds of this blessed union, but they are made one with each other in Him. They are the habitation of the same Spirit and partakers of the same faith, and are animated by a common life. In its most fundamental aspect this union is not a thing to be sought after or aspired to. It is a present reality, an existing fact, which should be recognized and acted upon, but not sought after.

We admit that there is an important sense in which this unity may be viewed as progressive. The Spirit may be imparted to us daily in richer measure, and our faith may with firmer grasp appropriate Christ in the fulness of His redemptive work and of His sanctifying grace. And as a result of this richer inflow of the Divine into the soul there will be a growing conformity of the thoughts, feelings, purposes, desires and life of the believer to the perfect example of Christ. And as we get nearer to the Master we shall find that we are getting nearer to all who bear His image. This Church is one, holy, Catholic and apostolic; and we have no occasion to degrade these predicates to a low or non-natural sense when we apply them to it. As the oneness of the Church depends on the presence of Christ by His Spirit in believers abiding in Christ by faith, it supplies no pledge for oneness of organization. The Scripture argument for this oneness, so far as we have seen it, is purely constructive, and its entire force is due to the underlying supposition that the Romish conception of the Church as a visible society is correct. The moment we rise to the Scriptural idea of the Church as the body of Christ, the *coetus fidelium*, the argument disappears.

Dr. Dollinger, a distinguished divine, pleads earnestly for the incorporation of all the Churches of Christendom, east and west, into one grand ecclesiastical organization, which he seems to desire shall be equally removed from the Protestantism of the Reformation and the Catholicism of the Vatican Council. He emphasises the fact that "the unity of Christian believers is itself to serve as the means to a further end; it is to be a testimony for the world in general, and for all nations, of the truth and divinity of the teaching of Christ." (P. 15.) He closes his volume with these words, addressed especially to German Christians, "But if we are willing to march to this contest, we march under a leader whose name may inspire the most faint-hearted with courage. It is He from whom descends every good and perfect gift, whose word is not yet fulfilled, but must be fulfilled in time to come: 'There shall be one fold and one Shepherd.'" (P. 165.)

It is important to ascertain the meaning of Christ's language here quoted and its bearing on the unity of the Church and the reunion of Christendom. From the manner in which Dr. Dollinger handles it, it is evident that if he and his friends of the old Catholic party have, since the Vatican Council, broken with Rome, they have not broken with the Romish idea of the Church. He quotes, probably following the Vulgate, the words, "There shall be one fold and one Shepherd." Had he examined the Greek he would have seen that the words will not bear this rendering, but must be translated as they are in our Revised Version, "One flock, one shepherd." But what constitutes a flock is not the enclosure in which they are folded, but the relation they sustain to each other, and especially to the Shepherd, whose sheep they are, and whose voice they obey. There is nothing in this text which is unfulfilled, or which necessarily contemplates that all Christians shall yet be embraced in one external organization. When we turn to Christ's prayer in John xvii. 21, we discover no petition that all Christians may be united in one visible society. The words run, "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." As we examine the prayer itself this conviction grows upon us.

It is a prayer, as we gather from verse 20, for all Christ's believing people then in the world, and "for them also which shall believe on Me through their word." It is a prayer which is presented expressly for all believers, from Christ's day to the end of time. There is no reference to an external society made up of all sorts of men. It includes none but believers.

What is asked on their behalf does not include the organic unity of the visible Church. No one imagines that the meaning is, that they shall be one in stature, colour, or nationality. No one believes that they shall be one in learning, mental powers, or general culture.

Why, then, should we suppose that they must be one in the profession of faith which they make, the sacraments they enjoy, or the

ecclesiastical government under which they live? Such a meaning must be put into Christ's words from some other source before it can be extracted from them. The language clearly points to a unity of a very different kind: "As thou Father art in me, and I in Thee, that they all may be one in us." It cannot be supposed that this unity can be realized in all the members of a visible society which includes both believers and reprobates. Reprobates who are acknowledged by Bellarmine to have a place in the Church, as defined by him, cannot be one in the Father and the Son. Judas Iscariot and Simon Magus were not in the company for whom Christ here prays, and did not share in the blessing sought, but they were both members of the visible Church.

It is claimed however, that the end for which this oneness of believers is sought, viz.:—"That the world might believe that thou hast sent me," implies a unity which is visible and palpable, as a great visible organization is the only thing the world can see and be impressed by. But such a unity does not necessarily lead the world to believe.

When the character and spirit of an organization happen to be bad, it may have the very opposite effect. It is only when the members of the visible Church illustrate in their lives the spirit of Christ that the world is impressed; and we venture to think that the impression will not depend so much on their being grouped in one or in many visible organizations as upon the beauty of the lives which they lead. History pours contempt upon the dream that the world is to be converted through the impression made by the unity of a great compact, visible society of all sorts of men. Something very different from the unity of a vast ecclesiastical corporation is needed to convince the world of the divinity of Christ's mission.

We hold that Christ's prayer is answered, and His promise that there shall be "one flock and one shepherd" has been made good. No man is a living Christian who has not been sanctified. He has experienced a fundamental spiritual change, in which the reigning power of sin is broken; his heart is devoted to God, and grace is enthroned as the ruler of his life. The transformation of the character and life thus begun advances progressively, and the Christian is "enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." The Scripture evidence for either the present or ultimate organic unity of the visible Church on earth disappears as soon as it is understood that the Church for which Christ prayed and whose unity He announced as a fact, the Church to which pertain the promises, is not a visible society of all sorts of men, but the body of Christ, made up of the Lord's redeemed "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation." But there is another consideration which Protestants at least should not overlook. It will not suffice to have a number of independent national Churches, whether Prelatic or Presbyterian, all modelled after the same pattern, and holding communion with each other, and unitedly embracing all Christendom. This gives similarity, but not oneness, in the visible Church. The Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States live under the same form of Government, and are in the most friendly relations with each other, but they are not one Church. The numerous bodies which form the Presbyterian Alliance have substantially the same creed, they use the same sacraments and have

THE SAME FORM OF GOVERNMENT,

but they are not one Church; because they do not live under one Government, or submit to a common authority. The logic of Rome is inexorable. If government enters into the definition of the Church, where there is one Church there must be one government. If the unity promised by Christ to His Church has relation to the fold, and not to the flock, there must be one fold in which all the sheep are found. What is promised is not met by numerous sheep folds scattered peacefully over the world, although all modelled after one pattern. The oneness must respect all the elements which enter into the definition of the Church; and if government and organization enter into the conception of the Church to which pertain the promises, there can be only one government and one organization in the Church. That is what the Papacy dreams and then teaches, what Tractarianism logically demands, and what some bewildered Protestants seem to be feeling after in the dark; but it is precisely what the Word of God does not teach. What is set up before us in the sacred page is not one Shepherd and one sheep-fold, but "one Shepherd, one flock." Certain it is that no measure of grace which has ever yet descended upon the Church of God has led even its most devoted members to think alike on matters of Christian doctrine, and we can scarcely assume that the government of the Church in the future is likely to prove an exception. There are natural limits to the extent of any organization, commercial, civil, or ecclesiastical, which can be controlled successfully by man. And we may safely affirm that "a universal Church would be as surely a misgoverned Church as a universal empire would be a misgoverned empire." Men who believe that a universal Church is the only channel of saving grace, and that it has in some way been clothed with infallibility, may give a forced submission to its rule; but others will seek a government more capable of dealing intelligently with their interests and advancing their welfare.

In determining the area over which a particular Church should extend, many considerations linguistic, national, geographical and political, need to be carefully weighed, and sanctified common sense will find ample play. But even when we confine our attention to a single country, where one visible Church could efficiently attend to the ecclesiastical interests of the people, very serious difficulties stand in the way of an incorporating union. We admit that in such a case an individual state of the visible Church is the ideal condition of things. This, however, does not throw much light practically on the attainableness of such a union, as we live in a world where ideals are not generally realized. It is a pleasant, and may be a very useful, thing for the representatives of different sections of the visible Church to come together to ascertain the measure of their agreement with each other, and to speak those fraternal words which Christian feeling impels them to utter; but it is not wise to build too high expectations of an organic union on such things until we have endeavoured to gauge intelligently some of the difficulties which must be overcome before the visible Church can be brought to present an undivided organization, even in one country, such as Canada.

"When men differ it is better to avow their diversity of opinion or faith, than to pretend to agree, or to force discordant elements in a formal uncongenial union." Where Christians cherish antagonistic convictions on important points of religion, we can only expect them to work together when their views have been brought into harmony. What are the prospects of attaining unity in the matter of Church government? The forms of Church government which obtain among Protestants may be regarded as practically three, viz., Prelatic, Presbyterian and Congregational or Independent, and it is evident that the three cannot work together in a visible Church unless we call that one Church which is made up of several distinct bodies, united by a semi-federal compact.

A congregation cannot be ruled at the same time by a bishop, by a Presbytery, and by itself. The New Testament has not left us without definite guidance in the matter of Church government. Dr. Withrow, indeed, assures us that "the opinion of all theologians who have studied the subject is, that no system of Church polity is contained in the New Testament." This is not his opinion. On the contrary he gives it as his "conviction, founded on a careful examination of the Word of God, that Church polity is an important portion of Christianity." Presbyterians hold that their system of government is "founded on, and agreeable to, the Word of God." While employing this language with greater or less stringency, a large proportion of those who have given most attention to the question agree with Dr. Withrow in believing that the Scriptures supply a divine warrant for the essential features of Presbyterian government. They do not claim a *ius divinum* for the details of their system, but only

for its formative principles. They readily admit that "there are many circumstances concerning the government of the Church common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word." From their examination of the Word of God, Presbyterians believe that the apostolic office has not been perpetuated in the Christian Church. They hold that "Presbyters, who labour in word and doctrine, are the highest permanent officers of the Church, and all belong to the same order." They also believe that each worshipping congregation should not regard itself as a self-governing and independent body, but so linked to the visible Church at large that, according to the law of Christ, a smaller portion owes subjection to a larger. With such formative principles as these embedded, as they believe, in the Holy Scriptures, Presbyterians cannot willingly aid in establishing any system of Church government which ignores or rejects them. For it would imply either a radical change of convictions, or a sacrifice of conscience and self-respect. We have viewed the attainableness of organic union entirely in relation to the divisions of Protestantism. Fidelity to the truth will not permit us to entertain seriously the wide range which some are anxious to give to union negotiations. We have not ceased to be Protestants. We do not regard the Reformation as a mistake, and we have no sympathy with those whose eyes wander towards the seven hills. We should cherish an earnest and unbiassed love of the truth. While not lightly throwing away views, we have learned from those who, in God's providence, have been our teachers, we should study God's Word dispassionately for ourselves, and use honestly all the sources of information within our reach. And when any new truth is discovered by us, we should seek grace and strength to follow where it leads. We should in this spirit openly acknowledge as Churches all those bodies to which that character really belongs. If we accept the Protestant idea of the Church to which Christ has given the promises, we must rank as visible Churches all bodies of Christians holding the fundamental verities of the Gospel, associated for the worship of God, mutual watch and care, and the extension of Christ's kingdom. We sin against Christ, the Head of the Church, and against the Holy Spirit, when we do not cheerfully acknowledge, in all suitable ways, societies of believers whose character and work have already received the divine imprimatur. This mutual recognition is specially called for between bodies which are feeling their way towards organic union.

A union is in place only between homogeneous bodies. A Church cannot unite with a Board of Trade, a temperance society, or anything save a Church. There should be a mutual recognition on the part of evangelical Churches of each other's discipline and official acts. If nothing more in the meantime is attainable, there seems no reason why evangelical Churches should not have a standing committee or council, with purely advisory functions, where their representatives might consult together about common interests with a view to secure united action.

We may see no feasible prospect of the early reunion of Christendom, but we can at least by God's grace say, "Whereunto we have already attained, by that same rule let us walk." We know that the oneness of believers for which Christ prayed is an existing fact, and that underneath all external divisions there is among Christians a profound and living unity. If we keep this fact distinctly before our minds it brings our thoughts and feelings gradually into harmony with itself, and many of the worst evils of Church divisions pass away. When a false view of the Church leads us to dwell on outward unity as of vital moment, the members of other communions seem separated from us by a great gulf, and we become so estranged from them that had we not been taught to love our enemies we would feel that we owe them nothing save suspicion and aversion. But when we think of believers of every name as the body of Christ, and with ourselves as the habitation of God's Spirit, our love goes forth towards them, and alienation and bitterness give place to "the unity of the Spirit," and the good offices of Christian brotherhood.

A FATAL LEAK.

A gentleman living in the country, whose supply of water for household purposes was scant, had a cistern dug near his house for collecting the rain which fell on the roofs of the buildings. For a time the expedient answered perfectly; the supply of water was abundant. Suddenly, however, the pump failed to give forth the contents of the reservoir. The rain would fall copiously, and for a time a few pailfuls would be drawn, but very soon the supply ceased. The pump was carefully examined and found to be in perfect working order, and no flaw could anywhere be discovered. At length it occurred to the perplexed householder to examine the cistern itself; then the mystery was solved. It was found that in one corner the cement had cracked, and there was a gaping leak which allowed the water to escape into a distant pit. It was now plain that however freely the rain might fall the cistern would soon be empty again, as there was this ever-widening leak through which the water disappeared. Such a leak in our church life is the Sabbath profaned or neglected. The rains from above may fall abundantly, the church's machinery may be diligently plied, but the law of the Sabbath largely forgotten will prove a leak serious enough to undo and render nugatory the happy influences both of the showers of heaven and the labours of man. It has been well said: "The streams of religion run deep or shallow, according as the banks of the Sabbath are kept up or neglected."—*Pearl of Days*.

THE UNFAILING HAND.

A traveller following his guide amid the awful Alpine heights, reached a place where the path was narrowed by a jutting rock on one side and a terrible precipice on the other. The guide, holding on to the rock with one hand, extended his other hand over the precipice for the traveller to step upon and pass round the jutting rock. He hesitated, but the guide said: "That hand never lost a man." He stepped upon the hand and passed on safely.

The child of God who takes the Saviour as His guide in this world of darkness and danger, has the help of an unfailing hand. Who that has ever trusted Him has been disappointed? He stretches out His hand for our help and deliverance. He holds us by His right hand in the midst of danger. And He has said: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." "That hand never lost a man;" blessed are they who can lie safely within its hollow, protected by its almighty grasp."—*Episcopal Recorder*.