

Original Contributions.

CHRISTIAN UNION.

H. MURRAY.

No subject in the religious world at the present time is attracting so much thought and attention as the subject of Christian union. The best and tallest minds in all the churches are coming to see its importance, and the absolute necessity of a united effort in order to the fulfilling the will and work of God. Such noted theologians as Dr. Parkhurst, Lyman Abbott, and others, have said plainly and loudly that denominationalism and divisions were false to Christianity. Truth and righteousness can never triumph, the kingdom of Christ in its fullness can never come, until the children of God are united in His service. The great design of Christ's mission on earth was one of peace. "He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to them who were nigh." (Eph. 2: 17) "The song of the angelic messengers was "Peace on earth and good will to men." Peace and harmony is the music of the heavenly life. The power of the cross was to break down all the divisions and partition walls, and to make of the two, Jew and Gentile, one new man, so making peace. This new spiritual nature must of necessity break down all divisions and form one common brotherhood. It must reconcile us all unto God in one body.

Although the necessity of Christian union is admitted, yet there seems to be an impression, quite prevalent, that such a union is impossible; but nothing can be impossible that is necessary. Why is it thought to be impossible? Simply because of a mistaken idea of what is required to consummate a union. It is generally supposed that the cause of the divisions are the differences of religious opinions, and to unite we must sacrifice our cherished principles, or some of them at least, and also be compelled to accept ideas and opinions that we do not now believe. Much of the labor in the cause of union has been along this line of harmonizing the conflicting principles of the Christian world; but they will not harmonize, and therefore there never will be a union of disputed principles.

Here is the mistake. Christian union does not demand or involve the sacrifice of any cherished principles or opinions, nor compel us to accept of any opinions that we do not already believe, from the fact that these conflicting ideas are not the cause of division. Go into any body of people and we find the same conflicting ideas that we find between different denominations and yet not divided. This shows us very forcibly that it is not the opinions that divide, and that we can hold conflicting views and still be united. What is it then that divides us? It is the use we make of our opinions. The pile of stones is the material out of which you make a wall and a division between you and your next neighbor, but no one would say that the stones were the wall. If your neighbor requested you to take away the wall you would not suppose he meant that you should dispose

of the stones. While we admit that the varied conflicting views that now exists are the material out of which the dividing lines are composed, we must also admit that we can have the material without the wall; and the demand or plea for Christian union to-day is that we dispense with the wall, but not with the material. We have a perfect right to our opinions, but we have no right to so use them as to divide the children of God.

Brother A and B made up their minds to become Christians. They made the good confession and were baptized into Christ, and were therefore Christians, members of the church of Christ. They each held to their own peculiar ideas and lived together in Christian union and fellowship a number of years. In course of time Brother B concluded he would become something more than a Christian, so he joined the church. That something more separated him from Brother A. It was the partition that divided them. Brother B soon saw that he was responsible for the division, and he saw the evil of it, and wisely decided to seek a union again. But how can this be effected? Do you say he must change his views? No, indeed. He and Brother A lived in union and fellowship a number of years holding the same views that he now holds. Must he come over the wall into Brother A's church? Verily not; he is there now; there is no coming about it, or changing of views. What, then, is needed? Take down the wall that separates them and be as he was before, only a Christian. Here is the only possible ground of Christian union, to become a Christian by the acceptance of undisputed truths and remaining simply a Christian and nothing more.

GOD'S RELATION TO THE WORLD.

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There is constant danger that we will forget God. Lest we do so, God's word reminds us, with great frequency, of his relation to the world of which we form a part. These reminders are especially numerous in the Old Testament Scriptures. But the New Testament also keeps this important matter prominently before us. The thoughts in this article are suggested mainly by New Testament passages.

I. GOD IS THE CREATOR. Some so-called scientists would persuade us that there has been no *creation*. Things have *developed*, they say—man from animals, the higher animals from lower forms, and so on back to the beginning. But, whatever truth there may be in the evolutionary theory, even that theory must admit a "beginning." And there the Scriptures of both Testaments meet the scientists. "In the beginning, God," says the Old Testament. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," says the New Testament, and both Testaments present God as Creator. "God created the heaven and the earth," says the Old. "All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that hath been made," says the New. Evolution may be a method of making things; but the method is not the maker. God is the maker, by whatever methods he has accomplished his work. He is "the God

that made the worlds and all things therein." "He made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth."

Certain important things follow from this. The first right in anything made is vested in the maker. What God has made, God owns. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Let all landlords and earth grabbers take notice that back of all claims that men may profess to the earth, or any portion of it, is the right of God based on creation; a right which he has never quit-claimed. And what is true of the earth's surface is true of its resources and its products. The silver and gold and precious stones, and valuable ores and minerals, stored away in the chambers of the earth are his treasures. And the myriad forms of life which crowd sea and land, as well as the abundant harvests from field and orchard, are his possession, "seeing he himself giveth to all life and breath and all things." Let the proud "possessors" of worldly wealth humble themselves before the Owner of all things, and confess themselves but stewards of his bounty.

But further than this—man himself is not exempt from this "right" of his Creator. "Ye are not your own," may truly be said of men in view of their owing their existence to God. A selfish life is a denial of God's ownership in us; but it does not invalidate his title. "God, whose I am," was Paul's acknowledgement of God's title to him, not only by right of redemption but by right of creation.

This ownership of God in us is the natural basis of all his claims upon us. The maker has the right to control the thing made. He has the right of service from the thing made. This right of God we would be compelled to admit even though his demands upon us were not filled with love and a desire for our highest welfare and happiness as they are.

II. GOD IS THE PRESERVER. The world does not sustain itself. It is true that the plant yields the seed and the seed reproduces the plant. It is true that animals and men propagate their kind. But it is not true that they do this without God. "For in him we live and move and have our being." He upholds all things by the word of his power. "In him all things consist," or "hold together."

Dissolution and death are everywhere active. Antagonistic forces tug perpetually at every existing thing, threatening to pull it asunder and reduce it to its original elements. They would tear planet from planet and reduce the solar system to chaos. They would tear atom from atom, and leave the orderly universe a heap of dust. It is not "nature," in the infidel Godless sense, that keeps things together and builds them up into ever new and beautiful forms. That is not "nature's" way. She is a vandal. She destroys. It is God who "holds things together."

God is the fountain of life. Death is the most "natural" thing in the world. "I die daily," is not only a confession of peril by a