

trines which are held by the two bodies are those of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the polity of both is, with unimportant differences, the same; so that whether you look to their doctrinal views or to their church government, there seems to be no good reason why they might not form one body. They are vastly nearer to one another than different sections of the same church have often been. But still there are great, perhaps unsurmountable, obstacles to a union. At all events, there must be very great changes before such consummation can be brought about.

The first difficulty lies with the vexed question of the magistrate's authority in religion; not that we imagine difference of opinion on this subject to be a sufficient reason for separation, but because the Free Church attaches, as we think, undue importance to it. In our Church the voluntary principle is not made a term of communion; but the establishment principle is made a term of communion in the Free Church. The doctrine of the Confession of Faith on this subject is expressed in the following words:—"The civil magistrate hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the church, the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God." (Chap. xiii. sec. iii.) Now this clause, which appears to give to the magistrate all the power he could desire in church courts, must be signed by every minister and elder of the Free Church. The acknowledgment of the magistrate's right to the things described in the words quoted is made a term of communion. Here, then, lies the great obstacle to a union; and it is altogether in the Free Church. In our church, the question of the magistrate's authority in religious matters is left an open question. We neither require the denial nor the acknowledgment of it as essential to communion with us. The doctrine of the Confession on the subject is simply dropped out of the Confession, as signed amongst us; and there is liberty to entertain any view of the subject that recommends itself to the judgment of individuals. It is obvious, that not until the Free Church begins to deal with the subject in the same manner, will a union between the two bodies be possible. We do not ask the Free Church to renounce their views on the subject of connection between the Church and State as preliminary to a union with us; we only ask them not to force their views upon us. Only let the Free Church make the subject of the magistrate's authority a matter of forbearance, as we do, and then a union may be effected without a single individual, either in the Free Church or in the United Presbyterian, being required to change his views in the smallest. What an amount of mischief and division, differences about the magistrate's authority have caused in the church of Christ! All our separations in Scotland have been more or less connected with this topic.

There are other obstacles to a union between the United Presbyterian Church and the Free Church, which, though not so formidable as the one already mentioned, would yet be found in practice, perhaps, as difficult to deal with. One is suggested by the manner in which the Original Seceders were united to the Free Church at the last Assembly. The idle notion of the Free Church being the true Church of Scotland, in a way no other body can claim to be, was prominently put forth, with many a flourish of trumpet, at every stage of the proceedings, and it was most dutifully echoed back by the party applying for union. The Original Seceders appeared at the bar of the Free Church Assembly more than a century ago; and the Free Assembly, acting as the descendants and representatives of that old erring Assembly, recognised the validity of the protest, absolved the parties from all blame, and received them back into communion. Now, these proceedings stultify the Free Church, and are only fitted to excite derision. For if the parties who retired from the Establishment in 1843 came out as the true Church of Scotland, notwithstanding they were a minority, simply because they had truth on their side; then, for the very same reason, the Original Seceders, who left the Establishment more than a century ago, on substantially the same grounds, and who are now acknowledged by the Free Church to have been right on their views, must have been all along, though a minority, the true Church of Scotland. Since the secession of the Erskines, the Establishment cannot have been the Church of Scotland at all. Yet we were told before the Free Church came into existence, by those who are now leaders in the Free Church, that the Erskines and their descendants were nothing but sectaries, and that the Establishment alone was the Church of Scotland. If this really was the case, if the Establishment, during the many long years between the secession of the Erskines and 1843, for great part of which time she was much worse than she is at the present moment, yet still remained the Church of Scotland, after a secession on sound and true principles had taken place, what is it that hinders her from being the Church of Scotland now, though another secession—effected also, let it be allowed, on true and sound principles—has occurred? By no argument will you prove the Free Church to be now pre-eminently the Church of Scotland, that will not equally demonstrate the first secession to have been the Church of Scotland from the time it took place. The Original Seceders go to the Free Church Assembly with their protest to be disposed of. What an absurd anachronism! The Free Church should have gone with their protest of 1843 to be disposed of by the body that had held, as they acknowledged, the true principles of the Church of Scotland for more than a century before that time.

But the whole affair is unworthy of serious consideration. The question as to who is best entitled to be called the Church of Scotland, is a mere dispute about words. If numbers are to settle this foolish question, then a census would require to be made of the different competing bodies. If actual connection with the State is to be taken as the test, then the Establishment is the Church of Scotland. If close and continuous adherence to the original principles of our Presbyterian forefathers is to make the rule, then, according to the acknowledgment of the Free Church, the Original Seceders were the true Church of Scotland. If the voice of Scripture is to be heard in the case, then the Church of Scotland consists of all the genuine followers of Christ in the land. But by no imaginable test whatever, excepting the arbitrary will of the Free Church leaders, will you prove the Free Church to be pre-eminently the Church of Scotland.

The claims put forth by the Free Church to be something more than other dissenters or seceders from the Establishment, something more than any other body in the land, will be a complete barrier to union, so far as the United Presbyterian Church is concerned. The maxim we set upon may be expressed in our Lord's words: "One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." We claim no precedence over the Free Church, though, if we were disposed to do so, longer standing would afford a ground of no little plausibility; still we claim no precedence; but equally we concede no precedence to her. And if the union that recently took place be the only kind of union she is prepared to enter into, there never will be a union between her and the United Presbyterian Church. If we meet at all, it must be on equal terms and on a common platform. When the Relief and Secession Churches were united, though the disproportion between their sizes was greater than between us and the Free Church, yet the idea of making either of them appear to enter the other was most studiously avoided, and exactly the same things were done by the one that were done by the other. They met as separate and independent bodies, and each made over all its rights to the other, and they became one. We confess that the proceedings of the last Assembly of the Free Church have extinguished, for a time, any idea we may ever have entertained of a union between them and us.

Besides the general course of the proceedings, there were particular remarks made which quite confirm us in the opinion we have given. One speaker expressed the hope, and the sentiment was applauded, "That some of the more moderate of that large and influential body, known by the name of the United Presbyterian Church, might yet see it to be their duty to unite with the Free Church." We dwell not upon the contemptuous phraseology here employed, "known by the name," as if the United Presbyterian Church were not as well known in Scotland as the Free Church, and as if she had not as good a right to the name she bears. How would our friends like that we should speak of them as that large and influential body known by the name of the Free Church? But that is a trifle, a mere straw showing how the wind blows. The thing to be reprobated in the words above quoted is the wish they imply, that the United Presbyterian Church may be dismembered. Yes, let her be broken into fragments, if, perchance, some of the fragments may be brought to us for our aggrandizement! But what gain would it be to the cause of union, that the United Presbyterian Church should be split into pieces, even though some of them should go to the Free Church? Or how can our friends suppose we will be pleased or flattered with the idea, that it is for the advantage of religion that the bonds of our union should be broken, in order to augment their numbers? What arrogance and self-conceit does not the expression of such an idea on their part imply? Reverse the case, and what would the adherents of the Free Church think if the hope were publicly expressed in our Synod, and the sentiment loudly applauded, that numbers of them might yet feel it to be their duty to leave the Free Church and to join us? Would they not feel that we were acting an unbrotherly part towards them? Would they not feel that all friendly relations must henceforth be at an end between us? The only proper reason we can imagine for desiring a union between different bodies is, that the number of separate sects may be diminished, and that the unity of the church may thus be more openly exhibited; but we conceive it better that bodies remain as they are, than that a union should be attempted whose effects must be to produce other divisions. When the union between the Relief and Secession Churches was under consideration, the universal feeling was that we must carry all the members of both bodies along with us; that it would serve no good purpose to amalgamate as one body, if such numbers refused concurrence as would lead to the formation of one, or perhaps two, other bodies. And, in fact, the union was delayed for a considerable time after decided majorities were favourable to it, that it might be accomplished without leaving a single fragment to exist separately from the united body; and this end has been gained. Where is there now a Relief Church—where is there now a Secession Church? If, therefore, there should ever be a union between the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church, we could reckon such an event desirable, only if accomplished in the same manner. Of what benefit would it be to the general interests of religion, that there should be a change consisting simply in the transference of a number of churches from the United Presbyterian Church to the Free Church, or from the Free Church to the United Presbyterian Church? Such changes might gratify individual pride and ambition, but it is difficult to see how they would advance the cause of christian union. We know not whether our correspondent may agree with us or not; but we assure him, that the late proceedings of the Free Church have made us feel that great changes must take place before a union between them and us can become practicable. In the private