

CHURCH UNION.

By Rev. R. G. MaBeth, M.A.

Without taking any irrevocable stand either for or against organic union, one who has watched the trend of discussion in the press and in the church courts, as well as the trend of events in the field of practical work, is forced to make the following observations:

The Presbyterian church is so evidently the hesitating party in the present negotiations, that efforts to force union are likely to result in a disruption. And such disruption would be due in some measure to the ill-advised way in which some advocates of union speak of those who hesitate, as men who are "keeping alive antiquated ecclesiastical prejudices and conceits," "obsolete religious cries", etc., or as men who through narrowness of spirit are hindering the progress of the Kingdom of God. Men who have conscientious difficulties as to going forward to organic union are being driven farther from it by this, apparently deliberate, attitude on the part of some of its leading advocates. This attitude was manifested to an almost unbearable point at the last Assembly. Let us have a better spirit.

This strained situation is being aggravated by the statement so frequently made that the Presbyterian church is already committed to the principle of organic union. This is not true and the people of our church are resenting it. The people alone can commit the Presbyterian church to union. The situation, so far, is that one of our Assemblies responded to overtures from a sister church and appointed a Committee to consider the matter. At the London Assembly Principal Patrick argued that it would be dishonest to bring negotiations to an end after the St. John Assembly had appointed such a Committee. The Principal knows perfectly well that one Assembly cannot bind another. One Assembly for instance decided to sever the tie between Queen's University and the church, but the next Assembly revoked the action. Thus far our church is committed to nothing in regard to union beyond paying the heavy expenses of the committee at a time when the funds are sorely needed for our own proper work.

It is not correct to say, as a recent writer asserts, that the Committees have met and "found no barrier to union." Many members of our committees will dispute that statement, but so far as documentary basis of union was concerned they found no insuperable objections to continuing the negotiations. That is all that can be said.

A good deal of nonsense is being talked about the denominations being at present "in hostile camps." Those of us who have been on military service know that the infantry, cavalry and artillery had separate camps. But they were not hostile camps. They were all brigaded under one leader. There may have been some healthy rivalry as to which branch of the service could get into action first and do most while there. But that kind of rivalry never hurt an army. It is the army with this type of rivalry which has always won victories for the flag. The Evangelical bodies are all brigaded around the banner of the cross under the leadership of Christ. But there are places for the Archbishop of Canterbury and General Booth, who are commanding different divisions. It is not always between congregations of the same denomination that the spirit of unity is most manifest.

A good many who never saw a frontier mission are anxious lest the existence

of separate churches in the West may prove the undoing of that country. Dr. Robertson never held that opinion nor do any of his successors. Nor do those of us who were born in that country and have watched it since there was only one Presbyterian Congregation west of the lakes. Some of us believe that no one church could have done the work that the several churches have done as separate bodies. As to new settlers, it has been our experience and observation that people coming from other countries ally themselves much more readily with the church when they find one which corresponds in name, polity and worship with the one they left at home. If they do not find such a one they often drop out altogether. The fact that many are coming at the present time from the Old Lands and from the United States may be a special reason why things should remain as they are. In regard to foreign peoples of other races the churches should be able to arrange their work to prevent overlapping as is done in many foreign fields.

It is suggested by some that the new union church could be made so comprehensive and non-descript that men of all views could find a place in it. One hopes that this consummation will never be reached. A creedless church cannot be a strong church any more than a creedless man can be a strong man; and one for instance shrinks from the idea of a church which has, without remedy, to have in its Ministry, men who assert that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God.

It is easy to sneer at one's attachment to the church of his fathers as sentiment. But sentiment is one of the most powerful elements in life and many agree with the great statesman who said that he had not a sentiment which he was not willing to die for.

On the whole it looks to many of us as if the inordinate pressure for union which is evident in some quarters will do more harm than good. The churches have within the last half century dropped practically all the old animosity and controversy and in a friendly spirit are doing their work side by side. If this feeling is allowed to go on developing, we shall doubtless see in the near future large measures of co-operative and federal union. But it will not be hastened by the habit into which some have fallen, who say that organic union must not be hurried and who at the same time call those who hesitate to rush it forward rather harsh names.

The truth is, as pastors and elders in active congregational work well know, that we have some questions to settle within our own church before we look for other problems. We have in some of our small towns two congregations of our own where there is scarcely room for one and yet we wonder why men refuse to support the Augmentation Fund. We have within our own church more organizations than we have room for, with the result that congregations are being split into factions. We are not keeping the men of the church in that close contact with the church which would be good for both. We have phases of college life and work which demand more serious attention. The next Assembly might discuss these and other questions that vitally affect us as matters of practical church statesmanship. The committee on business ought to keep the union debate for the closing days of Assembly, so that the pressing business of our own church may be done before the members begin to leave for home. So far our church in her guilelessness has suffered loss in many ways by this movement. Let us go on with our proper work till we have clearer indications of Divine leading in the direction of a kind of union which God does not demand in any other sphere of life.

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SPARKS FROM OTHER ANVILS.

Congregationalist: Reason, analogy, history point to a better world. It is Christ who gives assurance of progress. All ages have had vague notions of a hereafter. Christ brought immortality to light.

Michigan Presbyterian: We heard a physician remark to a crowd of men the other day that a habit (so far as it affected the brain, and all habits do) once formed never can be unformed. It can only be counteracted by the formation of another habit.

Presbyterian Standard: The probability is that our whole prison system should be remodelled upon Christian principles, and made to reflect the most advanced ideas in regard to the treatment of criminals. The system that does not reform will harden, and there is a possibility of a prison making criminals instead of mending them.

Herald and Presbtery: It is a misfortune to fall into the habit of not feeling well, and of pitying oneself. Of course, if one is sick and can not keep up, he must give up for the time; but even then it is better to take a cheerful view. The same thing is true in the Christian life. Habitual despondency is a sad misfortune. Faith always looks on the bright side.

United Presbyterian: The greed of the hour is the father to the lust of power. The materialism of the age is proof that the love of money is the root of all evil. That love extinguishes all other loves, or, at least, dims their luster. It turns the soul into a piece of machinery to be valued according to the financial output. Religion is sacrificed for revenue, the check book supersedes the Bible, and prayer becomes but the mumbling platitudes of a third rate politician.

Sunday School Times: Religion is worthless unless it makes us easier to live with. God is love; and those who profess to know him must be lovable, or self-confessed traitors. The earnest young Christian president of a college asks his friends to pray with him that the religious life of his college may be "sure and winsome." There is a prayer that every follower of Christ may well make his own daily petition for himself. Seeing truth, and talking about it, will not bring about this condition. Silent, consistent living in loving service for others is the secret. The sure and winsome life preaches Christ when all words fail.

Dr. Briggs seems, in the North American Review, to be looking forward to a union of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches under a constitutional papacy. What is a "constitutional papacy," anyway? This is the way in which a correspondent of the Central Presbyterian "sizes" the Dr. up: "Dr. Briggs is no doubt a scholar and man of learning and ability. I would not wish to speak disrespectfully of him, but as regards common sense and what the plainer sort call judgment, I suppose he is about the lightest weight in the whole church of America; the greatest theological acrobat of the age. He excites our admiration for the remarkable postures he can assume and the uncommon high vaulting he can practice, with such graceful agility. Whatever one may say about him it cannot be denied that he has plenty of action."