

CONTEMPORARY OPINIONS.

From the Edinburgh Evening Post

It has been no secret for some time past that amongst certain members of the Free and United Presbyterian Churches, an under current was in motion, for the ostensible purpose of bringing about a union of the two dissenting bodies, but, as has been suspected, with the real object of separating from and isolating the dominant leaders of the Free Secession, who have inflicted intolerable insults upon those of their brethren who have originated this singular, and perhaps not unnatural movement. Dr Caudlish and the dictatorial clique who form his immediate followers, have long stood in open direct antagonism to Dr Cunningham, Dr Begg, Dr Guthrie, Dr Hanna, and other prominent members of the Free Church. Several attempts, characterised by great acerbity of feeling, have been made to displace the minister of Free St George's from his commanding position; but, though for a time they seemed to shake the ground under his feet, these efforts really left the clever and dexterous Doctor more firmly on his legs than ever, rather increasing than diminishing the power and numbers of his supporters. It would appear, that open assault having thus signally failed in carrying, or even weakening, the stronghold of the Free leaders, the process of sup and mino has been resorted to, and a kind of conspiracy has been formed, whereby it is hoped to drive Dr Caudlish and his party into unconditional surrender, or into a sort of ecclesiastical exile.

Such is the explanation which we have heard, and which we believe is currently entertained, of the cause and origin of the curious document elsewhere inserted under the title "Contemplated Union between the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church." This manifesto has naturally created a good deal of sensation amongst those who were not previously aware of the drift of the parties to whom we have alluded; to those who are well informed of their spirit and objects it is but a natural step in the course resolved upon, to carry out the scheme already matured. Its form and appearance, however, are calculated greatly to mislead and deceive. It professes to emanate exclusively from certain *Lay Members* of the Free and United Presbyterian Churches, and is signed, solely by parties in that position. From this it would seem—and the idea is studiously kept up throughout—that the clerical members of the two bodies have had nothing to do with the original suggestion, preparation, and promulgation of this sectarian programme. We are almost told in fact, that it is entirely of lay manufacture. The policy of putting such a face on the matter is obvious; for if it had been plainly evident that the whole movement was conceived and concocted in the brains of certain Free Church ecclesiastics, not the most distinguished for weight or talent, the affair would have come

into this breathing world still-born. It would have been regarded as simply the effusion of mortified vanity and abortive ambition, and would have only excited pity and contempt. To avoid this catastrophe, the real authors of the manifesto have carefully screened themselves from public view, and put forward only the names of men who never saw the document until they were asked to affix their signatures to it—yea or nay. We are sure that the Rev. Dr Hanna, for instance, will be able to verify this statement; and we doubt not that he will, with equal candour, acknowledge that the whole scheme was originally planned and duly weighed and approved of by his clerical brethren *before* a single lay member of either Church was permitted to peruse or requested to sign the paper. The lay members are merely acting as cat's-paws to the clerical conclaves behind the scenes. This is the truth—whatever it may be worth—and the truth should be known,

We attach some importance to the circumstances we have just explained, because it is not improbable that, from the shape in which the manifesto appears, many will suppose that the members of both Churches generally are parties to the "Contemplated Union," and that the document is backed by a decided unanimity of sentiment amongst those whom it most concerns. Such is not the fact, however, and by and by we have little doubt that some remarkable results, affecting the very existence of these Churches, will flow from the present attempt to amalgamate parties whose professed principles are, in many respects, essentially irreconcilable.

It is apparent that a great effort has been made to obtain a display of the highest and most influential names amongst the laity of the two dissenting Churches. The result is anything but overwhelming. The muster-roll is led off by a Marquess, an Earl, and Baron, followed up by three Baronets, a Glasgow civic Knight, two M. P's, and several manufacturers and merchants, who have raised themselves to the rank of landlords. The remainder of the names are no doubt "respectable," but the array is not calculated to impress the public with any deep sense of the weight, dignity, eminence, or influence of the membership of the Free Church and United Presbyterian bodies. The list, in fact, is almost as notable for the names omitted as for those included!

We may pass by the first three resolutions as spleenisms—sounding commonplace, which are as easily accepted as propounded. But the fourth of the series contains one or two assertions which will excite general surprise at the audacity of their clerical enunciators. Even the most ignorant laymen would not be justified in emitting such gross misstatements. It is alleged that the Free and United Presbyterian Churches are "both equally attached to the Presbyterian form of Church government, *adhere to the same standards of doctrine and discipline.*" &c. Now, this latter assertion is most positively

false. The United Presbyterians do not accept the Confession of Faith either to the same extent or in the same sense as the Free Churchmen—especially with reference to the position and functions of the Cicerone Magistrate—and this fact is so notorious that we can only wonder at the attempt thus openly made to deny or ignore what constitutes so vast a difference between the parties.

There is another allegation in the resolution which is historically untrue, and in some respects very fallacious—namely, "that both Churches maintain with equal steadfastness and sincerity, the great principles of non-intrusion and spiritual independence, on behalf of which their fathers contended with unflinching and self-sacrificing devotedness." It so happens, however, that while the "fathers" of the present race of United Presbyterians were "seceding" from the Church of Scotland, the "fathers" of the existing Free Churchmen were devoted members of the Establishment, and they themselves were its most zealous supporters and advocates down to a very recent period. Such reminiscences are at least awkward, and seem to contradict in the most emphatic manner the fraternal sentiments now so eagerly advanced. *Tempora mutantur*

The resolution is a glaring and shameless attempt to confound and huddle up all the distinctive principles and doctrines of the two bodies. It is admitted that the subscribers (or rather the clerical gentlemen whom they represent) "entertained different views as to the course which the State is bound to pursue in reference to the interests of the Church, and more especially on the question of endowment—this point ought to be left as a question of forbearance." In short, it is proposed that the members of these bodies whatever they may deem to be their duty in the matter, shall just button their principles in their pockets, and do nothing. In this way, they neither offend nor take offence. The great principle of religious establishments and State endowments is to be "an open question," as one of no practical consequence! What then becomes of the Free Protestant Church of Scotland? Where are all its vaunted rights to assume and hold the position of the *real* Church of Scotland? Must we suppose that all the ink shed and paper blotted on this subject were parts of a solemn farce, never meant to express any serious views or actual intentions on the part of those who went out of the Church with such noisy demonstrations? How can the Free Church, after threatening all manner of pains and penalties against those of its members who should dare to hold Voluntary principles, consort or coalesce with the United Presbyterians, who repudiate the Establishment principle? The problem seems an impossible one, but it appears that it is to be got over by simply looking away from it. We should think that the act will require pretty hard winking in some quarters.

The seventh resolution would appear to be not a whit less fallacious than the two