

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.CONCLUDING PORTION OF MODERATOR'S
CLOSING ADDRESS.

I have said that it does not seem to have been the mind of Christ that there should be, in outward things, an organic unity, or rigid uniformity, established in His visible Church. And I cannot help thinking those texts of Holy Scripture which are commonly urged in support of the opposite opinions have been very sadly perverted from their proper meaning. This is more particularly the case with our Lord's solemn prayer on the eve of His crucifixion. There is nothing in that prayer that can be held as pointing to a union that is merely external and governmental. It aims at something far higher and holier than any mere outward incorporation of professing Christians, bound together by an agreement among themselves in the observance of a common polity and ritual. The union which it contemplates is altogether of a spiritual nature—a union of true Christians knit together by the bond of faith, whereby they are all united to Christ, their living Head, and thus, in Christ, united to one another. And I can easily conceive an association of professing Christians to be outwardly incorporated with one another in the most orderly subjection to the same system of Church government, and the most strict conformity to the same prescribed method of worship; while yet, by reason of the utter want of unanimity as to some of the most vital articles of revealed truth, and it may be also of their want of charity towards each other, they are as far as possible from fulfilling that earnest prayer of the Saviour for His true disciples when he said—"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one—as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee—that they also may be one in us." (Applause.) In speaking thus, however, we would not be understood as calling in question the desirableness of an entire agreement among professing Christians, even in things external and circumstantial, in so far as without compromise of principle it can be attained, still less as justifying that captious and contentious spirit which would for the sake of the most accessory and subordinate matters, disturb the peace and break the unity of a Christian Church. (Applause.)

It has sometimes been cast as a reproach on Presbyterianism, that it has a tendency to foster lax views of ecclesiastical unity and order, and even to give rise to endless divisions and dissensions in those branches of the Christian Church in which it has been established. And it must be owned that to those who look only at certain recent occurrences in our own history, and who take but a superficial glance at these occurrences there may seem to be some show of justice in the im-

putation. I am confident, however, that when more carefully examined, any such charge will be found to be entirely groundless. It is matter of history that many of the greatest schisms and most grievous heresies with which Christendom was ever disturbed, have had their origin, not under a Presbyterian, but under a Prelatical system. So was it with the wide-spread divisions and contentions occasioned by the Donatists, the Arians, the Nestorians, and other schismatical sects of the fourth and following centuries. So was it with the greatest schism between the Greek and Roman Churches. So was it with the woeful apostasy of Rome itself, and with the glorious Secession from it at the era of the Reformation. And, as we come down the stream of time, we still find that schisms and secessions are not peculiar to Presbyterianism. Witness Bartholomew's Day in the Church of England, when no less than two thousand ministers felt constrained to resign their benefices, and sever themselves from her communion, including many of the ablest, most learned, and most devoted ministers by whom that renowned Church has ever been adorned. Witness, in more recent times, the rise and progress of Methodism, which has now become a large, influential, and flourishing Church. Witness, in our own day, the lamentable perversion of too many of the clergy as well as laity of the Anglican Church, who, in the course of the last twenty-five years, have renounced the Protestant faith for the delusions and corruptions of Romanism. And to say nothing of these already accomplished facts, no one, I am sure, who calmly considers the state of things now subsisting in the sister Establishment can fail to see that there are to be found in her a variety of disuniting elements which, if it were not for certain extraneous influences by which her proper ecclesiastical functions are effectually repressed, if not absolutely superseded, would speedily give rise to discords and divisions of a much more serious kind than we have ever experienced. (Hear, hear.) Add to all this, that those secessions which are charged against us cannot with any real justice be regarded as the natural and proper fruit of our system of Church government. They have one and all of them arisen from causes with which Presbyterianism, as such, had nothing to do—from circumstances connected with the terms of union between Church and State, with the statutory mode of appointment to vacant benefices—circumstances which might have existed in any Established Church, Prelatical or Congregational, as well as Presbyterian, and which, under any form of government, if regarded with the same conflicting sentiments by a people distinguished by the proverbial fervour of the Scottish temperament, would, under any form of Scottish government, have led to the same results. (Applause.)

Nor is it immaterial to consider that our