

CHURCH UNION IS NOT A TRUST

Progress of the Movement Among Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists

By W. L. EDMONDS

TRUSTS are recognized as bad institutions for the welfare of mankind. Trusts have been fought by the press and by the people. Trusts are said to have raised the cost of living and taken away much of the joy and freedom of life. Under trust rule individual action is reduced to a minimum, art is discounted, freedom of expression is hampered, social discontent arises—and presently there arises some other combination to combat the trust. The second may be as bad as the first, or worse. Socialism may be the worst form of trust in the world. Labour unions may be so misdirected that they become a syndicate robbing the worker of his individuality out of regard to the rights of the corporation. Theatrical trusts are responsible for a great majority of the bad plays in our theatres. National trusts coerce the people into a machine for the execution of a single idea—and the Prussian national trust is the worst ever known in the world, against which the world of freedom is now fighting as it never fought before.

Is Church Union another form of trust—in the spiritual world? Will the union of Christian churches into as far as possible one church rob mankind of religious individuality and freedom? Or is the union of churches only a sensible, fraternal proposition whose principle is the greatest good to the greatest number and the elimination of useless rivalries?

In the following article the writer traces the history of the Church Union movement in this country and notes what he considers its advantages in practical operation. He does not regard Church Union as a form of religious syndicate. He believes in it as a means of making church life more useful to the masses. His arguments and his narrative are well worth considering by any average man or woman who recognizes the church as a great force for the betterment of social conditions.

WHEN the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada recently adopted, by an overwhelming majority, the report of the committee on Church Union, another stage in the movement for the confederation of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational denominations in this country was reached. The concurring vote was 367 to 74, and not only gave the advocates of union the largest majority since the Assembly five years ago passed upon the subject, but shows that on a percentage basis the opponents of the innovation are gradually decreasing in relative strength as far as it is represented in the highest court of the church.

In 1910, when the basis of union was first under consideration, the recorded vote of the opponents of union was 28 per cent. of the total case; in 1914 it was 27 per cent., and at the recent meeting of the General Assembly, 16 per cent.

As the Methodist and Congregational denominations are both ready for union, its consummation only awaits the final decision of the Presbyterian Church.

THIS final decision cannot be given for a year or two at the least. In the first place, the question has to be submitted to the individual congregations composing the church in Canada. Of these there are over 2,325, not including home missions to the number of about 2,000, while of members entitled to vote upon the question there are about 315,000.

After the questions which are now being prepared have been submitted to and voted upon by the people, the subject of union will again come before the General Assembly, which does not meet until June, 1916. If the vote of the people is favourable to union by a substantial majority, there can be little or no doubt in regard to the action of the highest court in the church. But even after the people and the General Assembly have concurred in favor of Church Union, its consummation cannot be accomplished until Federal and Provincial legislation has been obtained. The House of Commons will have to pass upon incorporation, and in each of the Provincial Legislatures an Act will be necessary permitting the transfer to the united church of the property now held in the name of each of the three churches uniting.

There can be little doubt what the result of the vote will be when it is again submitted to the people. When submitted in 1912 the vote was in favor of union, but unfortunately only about 37 per cent. of the members of the church cast their ballots. As in 1905, the General Assembly had laid down the principle "that a union of the churches, to be real and lasting, must carry the consent of the entire membership," the vote was naturally not considered satisfactory, and proceedings towards union were, for the time being, stayed.

AT the meeting of the General Assembly in 1914 an attempt was made to have further negotiations with the Methodist and Congregational Churches suspended until such time as a stronger spirit in favour of union was manifested. This attempt was negated by 289 to 109.

Negotiations were then resumed, with the result

that a few months ago the joint committee of the three denominations concerned reached an agreement regarding the name, doctrine and polity of the proposed Union Church.

The name agreed upon was the United Church of Canada. The doctrine, while largely based on that obtaining in the three negotiating churches, does not differ in essentials from that of either. If anything, it shows a desire to impart to doctrine a little more elasticity and a broader spirit. In regard to polity, it was agreed that the highest court of the United Church should be known as the General Council. Next in order are the Conference and Presbytery. The first-named court will meet every second year and will be Dominion-wide in its representation. The Conference will meet annually, and the Presbytery will correspond in its functions to the court of that name now operating within the Presbyterian Church. Local churches are to have a session to superintend their spiritual affairs, a committee of stewards to manage their business affairs, and these two combined are to form the official board, whose office will be to oversee the general affairs of its own particular congregation. This basis of union has been formally accepted by the three denominations concerned.

But one of the most significant features in regard to the basis of union for the proposed United Church is its democratic character. Each individual congregation will practically be able to employ whatever form of worship its people may deem best suited to its requirements. Each of the three denominations, for example, may continue to use its own hymn-book. In fact, the umbrella that is being raised is expansive enough to take in Anglican and Baptist denominations should they at any time be disposed to participate in the union.

Nine years ago the Anglican Church offered to confer upon the subject of union, provided the joint committee of the three negotiating churches was willing to treat along the lines laid down by the Lambeth Conference. As this implied the acceptance of Episcopacy, negotiations with the Anglican Church were discontinued. The Baptist Church, considering it "necessary to maintain a separate organized existence," refused to participate in the movement for union.

CONSUMMATION of the present movement for the union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches, in its final analysis, merely means the union of the higher courts of each. And that means a great deal, for in its train will come greater efficiency, greater economy, and an absence of the overlapping which is now so common in the work of the three denominations.

The total membership of the three denominations which are negotiating for union was, in 1914, 697,444, of which 368,992 were Methodists, 314,832 Presbyterians, and 13,616 Congregationalists. Counting adherents, the number of people interested is much larger. For example, according to the last census, there are in Canada 1,115,324 Presbyterians, 1,079,892 Methodists, and 34,054 Congregationalists, a total of 2,229,270, or 30.93 per cent. of the total religious population of Canada. By way of comparison, it may be pointed out that the Roman Catholic population is 2,833,041, or 39.41 per cent. of the total. As there are 203 sects or denominations in Canada, the number would still stand at over 200 should the Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists sink their identity, as far as name is concerned, in the proposed United Church.

JUST when the spirit of union among the non-conformist churches of Canada had its birth no one can say. But it is significant that the first nonconformist church built in Canada was for a union congregation. This was in 1751, and was erected at Halifax by the Imperial authorities. Its congregation composed Congregationalists, Presbyterians, German Lutherans, Wesleyans and others, while the preacher was an American Congregationalist by name of Rev. Aaron Cleveland, an ancestor of the late ex-President Cleveland. The church was, however, finally absorbed by the Presbyterians, who predominated in the congregation.

The present movement for union had its definite inception in 1899, when on the initiative of the Presbyterian Church, the Methodists and Congregationalists were induced to join in a scheme having for its object co-operation in the home mission field of the Northwest Territories, where at that time there was a great deal of overlapping, and consequently waste effort in the work of the three denominations. But in 1902, upon the suggestion of the Methodist Church, a joint committee, representing the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches, was appointed to devise a plan for a still larger enterprise, namely, organic union, and two years after the church courts of the three denominations had adopted concurring resolutions in favor of the proposal. Since then the movement has made more or less headway, with intervening periods of

passiveness and sometimes spasmodic activity.

That the movement, which is apparently stronger to-day than it ever was, is not born of any desire for denominational aggrandizement is self-evident from the fact that Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, each of whom is proud of its name, tradition and history, are willing to sink their identity in order to unite, not for the propagation of any creed, but for the specific and definite purpose of securing greater efficiency in social service and in home and foreign mission work.

THOSE who are opposed to organic union are in sympathy with the object sought, but their contention is that it can be obtained by co-operation. But so far the only organized effort to negative the movement for organic union is within the ranks of the Presbyterian Church. And although they are apparently a small minority, yet they are aggressive, and boast that they are prepared to spend large sums of money in order to preserve the Presbyterian Church and defeat the purpose of the advocates of organic union. One prominent and wealthy member is credited with saying that he is personally prepared to put up half a million dollars.

But if the people want union money will not prevent its consummation. And apparently the people do want it. The spirit of union is abroad throughout the length and breadth of the land. In the Western Provinces, where the need of union is more strongly felt, there are between forty and fifty union churches. Some of these were started as union churches. Others are amalgamations of two or more congregations. These churches were started with the view of identifying themselves with the United Church which the Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists have, during the last fourteen years, been trying to form. If the present movement for Church Union fails, it is said these union churches in the West will go over to the Congregational denomination.

PROBABLY the most unique and interesting attempt at Church Union that is being worked out by an individual congregation in Canada is that being operated by the Northern Congregational Church in Toronto, the pastor of which is Rev. Frank Day, M.A., B.D. This church, which had its origin in 1858, found it necessary a few years ago to look about for a new site, which was ultimately found in the new residential district of North Rosedale. As there was no church in the district, which contained about 400 families, the pastor conceived the idea that it would be well, before building operations were commenced, to try and have it made a union church. The first step was to consult the joint committee, which the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches in Toronto appointed a couple of years ago, to regulate the establishment of churches and missions within the city, in order that overlapping and crowding might be avoided. This committee, falling into line with the views of Mr. Day and his congregation, decreed that its consent would be withheld should an attempt be made by any body of Presbyterians, Methodists or Congregationalists to establish a church within the confines of North Rosedale. The church was then erected at the corner of Roxborough Street and Glen Road, and in December last was formally opened. Since then, of eighty-five new members received, only ten were Congregationalists. The rest were from other denominations, including Anglicans and Baptists.

The practical experiments which are being worked out by individual congregations in Canada appear to augur well for the larger scheme of church union should the efforts of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches give birth to the United Church of Canada.

Organize the Brains

MR. LLOYD GEORGE made a great speech in the British House of Commons on June 23rd, in which he laid down as the first principle of success this maxim:

"We must have the aid of the best business brains available."

What a stirring time there would be in this country if Sir Robert Borden were to come back from England and say:

"We must have the aid of the best business brains available."

Mr. Lloyd George finds that Great Britain can only succeed in organizing the resources of the Empire by calling in the business men to help the Government. He has discarded the politicians. He has discarded the grafters and the middlemen. He has called in the patriotic business men, hundreds of them.

What a leap ahead Canada could make if the leading business men were put to work to organize our farming, our fishing, our mining, our transportation, our manufacturing, and our finances, so that Canada would give the greatest possible aid to the Empire in this testing time! Hundreds of them would serve gladly and freely on national committees.