

## Our Contributors.

### WHAT WOULD BE GAINED BY ORGANIC UNION?

BY KNOXIAN.

It is a very difficult thing to bring an effusive organic unionist down to hard pan and get him to say exactly what he thinks would be gained by union of all the denominations. Like some of the good people who shout "glory," "glory" at camp-meetings, he has an idea that it is a proper thing to shout "union," "union," but he is not very clear as to what union means or what union would do.

There is one kind of organic unionist, however, who comes down to business in a way we can all understand. We mean the economic unionist, who contends that money would be saved by uniting the denominations and shutting up two or three churches here and there throughout the country. This position is unassailable. Money would be saved by shutting them all up. If the main thing is to save money, then the fewer churches we have open the better. The Presbyterians of Montreal might save a large sum annually by turning in with our Jesuit friends. Two or three Presbyterian congregations in Toronto might close their places of worship, pay off their ministers, and find room in St. Michael's. Two or three more might go to the Unitarian Church. There is probably room there. Now we freely admit that these are rather extreme suppositions, but they illustrate splendidly the fact that saving money is not the main thing to be considered in dealing with church questions. Money is one thing, money is an important thing, but it is not the main thing in church matters, and should the day ever come when so-called Christian men are found negotiating church unions in the same secular spirit as business men arrange for the union of banks or insurance companies; railways or loan companies; school sections or cattle-shows, it won't make the difference of a single straw whether the denominations are united or not. The denominations will then be nothing more than poorly-managed business concerns. There are other considerations more important than saving a little money, and if the economical organic unionist does not think so, let him ask any intelligent liberal Presbyterian who gives a tenth part of his income to his Church, why he does not practise economy by taking his family to the Salvation Army or some organization in which there is nothing to pay.

It has often been urged that the money saved by closing up one or two churches here and there might be given to missionary purposes. Yes, it might be, and so might money expended in a dozen other ways, but would it be? That's the question. We shall not discuss this point. If the advocates of organic union can show that the money expended in supporting three churches where two would do would be devoted to missionary purposes, they certainly have this point in their favour. Against this contention it might be urged that the most liberal supporters of missions now are almost invariably strong denominational men, and the loudest talkers about union sometimes belong to a denomination different from that of the collector who is vainly trying to squeeze a few cents out of them for missionary purposes.

The moral impression argument has already been dealt with. It has been shown that it is the quality of men, not their numbers, that makes an impression for good. This moral argument might be called the brass band argument. It has its origin in the vulgar idea so common in America, that the merits of everything depend upon its size. A crowd must always be great, even though composed of imbeciles. It is useless to tell the admirers of the brass band logic that a crowd has not necessarily any moral power. The crowd that used to gather to see a man hanged was always large, always deeply interested, and always united, but we never heard that such crowds impressed the world very much for their good.

By the brass band argument it might be shown that the most influential prayer meeting in Canada is held in the Kingston Penitentiary. This meeting is attended by seven hundred persons every time, and no doubt the largest in the Dominion. Numbers in this case are scarcely a guarantee for moral and spiritual power. Once more let it be said that it is the spirit, the zeal, the self-denial, the self-sacrifice of Christians that impresses sensible men—not their numbers.

It is sometimes contended that Christian unity would be promoted by organic union. The present is rather an unfortunate time for this contention. It so happens that nearly all the church troubles at present existing in Canada are within the denominations—not between them. The Methodists, recently united, have no quarrel with any other denomination, but they make a very troublesome question among themselves, which has stirred up a good deal of strife, and seems no nearer a peaceful solution now than it was years ago.

The Episcopalians have no special quarrel with the Methodists or Presbyterians, but they fight fiercely about high church and low church among themselves. The Presbyterian Church as a whole has no equal at present without or within, but some of our congregations that are on good enough terms with neighbouring congregations of other denominations get up scandalous rows in their own ranks. Everybody knows that organic union does not necessarily promote a spirit of union. There are thousands of Christian men worshipping in different denominations who are far better friends than if they were in closer ecclesiastical relations.

And there are some in every denomination who would love each other much more, or perhaps we should say hate each other less, if they belonged to different denominations.

John B. Gough used to tell a good story about a husband and wife who indulged in occasional quarrels. One evening after a storm of unusual severity they were sitting silently beside the fire. The old man noticed a tear stealing down the good woman's cheek. "What are you crying about?" he asked in an angry tone. "I was looking," said she, "at the dog and the cat sittin' so peacefully by the fire, and I was thinkin' that if they agreed so well what a shame it was for us to be quarrellin' so." "Humph," said the old man, "tie them together and see what they'll do."

If tied together no doubt they would make things lively. There are thousands of good men living peaceable and useful lives in different Churches, and if tied together ecclesiastically there would be trouble in twenty-four hours. Their education was different, their habits are different, their tastes are different, their ways of thinking and doing things are different, and they are much better separated than they would be if tied together.

Tie up a stalwart Ulster Presbyterian, bred on the Confession and Catechisms, strong on the covenants, with a clear, clean-cut, all-round theology—tie him up with a soft, gushing "Plym" who talks pious platitudes and looks at things with a kind of furtive stare. Nothing short of a miracle of grace would keep the Irishman from punching his head.

Tie up a High'landman who sings nothing but Psalms, who would run out of the church at the sight of a melodeon, who can scarcely be induced to speak on the subject of personal religion—tie him up with an effusive Methodist who shouts "glory hallelujah" every time the minister makes a good point, and who can rattle off his religious experience at a moment's notice. The Highlander would fight for his Master at the cannon's mouth, but he could not stand the amen corner in a Methodist Church five minutes.

Tie Principal Caven and Sam Jones together ecclesiastically, and see what the result will be.

It is not necessary to say that organic union would not make the real, vital work of the Church any easier. The world would remain the world, the flesh would always be the flesh, the devil would continue the same old devil. Sin would always be sin if all the denominations were united to-morrow.

### THE Gnostic HERESY.—ITS RISE, PROGRESS AND EFFECTS.

FROM THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF THE LATE MR. T. HENNING.

On reviewing the whole subject we would remark generally that all the effects of Gnosticism may be classified under one or other of these three divisions, viz., Mysticism, Asceticism, and Licentiousness. On each of these we shall offer a few remarks before we bring this essay to a close, and first a word or two on the effects of their Mysticism:

To this a numerous class of errors may be traced, for mystery, as has been already remarked, was the very soul of Gnosticism. It was opposition to a gross and sensuous conception of divine things, among the Jews and Christians, that gave the strongest impetus to Gnosticism at first, and it furthered its propagation the more, because, as we have seen, "Christianity had awakened also new spiritual wants, which could find no satisfaction in a mere faith founded on authority which despised everything ideal, cast away from it all higher contemplation and intuition, and abruptly rejected all speculation." The elementary tenet, however, of the irreclaimable evil of matter, lay at the foundation of all. It was this that originated the great characteristic of the Oriental systems in general, viz., the exclusion of the Primal Deity from all intercourse with matter. That intercourse in the Gnostic systems had taken place through a derivative and intermediate being more or less remotely proceeding from the sole fountain of Godhead.

This, however, was not the part of Gnosticism which was chiefly obnoxious to the sentiments of the Christian body. Their theories about the malignant nature of the Creator, whom they identified with the God of the Jews; the Docetism which asserted the unreality of the Redeemer; these points excited the most vigorous resistance. But when the wilder theories of Gnosticism began to die away, and when the greater part of the Christian world began to agree in the doctrines of the eternal supremacy of God, the birth, the death, the resurrection of Christ as the Son of God, the effusion of the Holy Spirit—when mysticism or Gnostic feeling had thoroughly pervaded and leavened the Church—questions began to arise as to the peculiar nature and relation between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It was in this way that the Trinitarian Controversy, which led to all the evils of human strife—hatred, persecution, bloodshed—came to be the natural though tardy growth of Gnostic opinions. In studying the history of this controversy it is remarkable to find what an effect mysticism, or Platonism, exercised over the views and opinions of men. This Platonism, too, appears to have gradually absorbed all the more intellectual class; "it hovered over, as it were, and gathered under its wings all the religions of the world." Indeed, it has not yet been fully overcome. Traces of it are still discernible amongst some of the German mystics and minds like those of Thomas Carlyle or S. T. Coleridge. Does not the following sentence from the

latter author indicate the lingering remains of this mysticism in the minds of men? "Who can say," concludes Coleridge, speaking of the Trinity, "who can say, as Christ and the Holy Ghost proceeded from, and are still one with the Father, and, as all the disciples of Christ derive their fulness from Him, and, in spirit, are inviolately united to Him as a branch is to the vine, who can say, but that in one view, what was once mysteriously separated may as mysteriously be recombined, and without interfering with the everlasting Trinity, and the individuality of the spiritual and seraphic orders, the Son, at the consummation of all things, will deliver up his mediatorial kingdom to the Father, and God, in some peculiar infinitely sublime sense, become all in all!"

Farther, these controversies about the Trinity, taken in connection with the doctrine of the æons, those mediators between God and the world of man, tended, indirectly it may be, to the promotion of the worship of angels, saints and martyrs. The earliest images, doubtless, emanated from the Gnostics, who not merely blended the Christian and pagan or Oriental notions on their gems and seals, but likewise consecrated small gold and silver images of all those ancient sages whose doctrines they had adopted, or had fused together in their wild and various theories.

2. Asceticism.—From the Gnostic idea of a deity eternally at war with matter, and abhorring the conditions and resenting the humiliations of animal life, sprung asceticism, which forced its way at a very early period into Christianity, where for many centuries it predominated and subdued even the active and warlike genius of Mahometanism to its dreary and ecstatic influence. "On the cold table-lands of Thibet; in the forests of India, among the busy population of China, on the burning shores of Siam, in Egypt and in Palestine, in Christianized Europe, in Mohometanized Asia, the worshipper of the Lama, the Fakir, the Bouze, the Talapoin, the Essene, the Therapeutist, the Monk and the Dervish, have withdrawn from the society of man, in order to abstract the pure mind from the dominion of foul and corrupting matter." The Gnostic principle was: That the highest order of sanctity attainable on earth is in the possession of those who withdraw themselves as far as possible from the conditions of animal life, and especially who renounce all obedience to the laws of the sexual constitution. Celibacy, which in the ancient Church was but an act of "abstraction of the incarcerated soul from the hyle, the dregs of this lower world" was the offspring of Asceticism. The making of the conditions of animal life, and the common alliances of man in the social system, as directly opposed to the divine perfections, and so to be escaped from by all who sought to excel in virtue, was the Gnostic leaven which finally gained a firm hold of the Christian community, caused many of those superstitions which have continued to oppress Christianity up to the present time, and whose practical operation has deeply influenced the whole history of man.

3. Licentiousness.—As, on the one hand, we observe a tendency of Gnosis to a strict asceticism, which opposes itself to Judaism as to a sensuous and carnal religion, so we remark on the other, that it has also a tendency to a wicked antinomianism, which confusing Christian freedom and unbridled license, set Christianity in opposition to the very "inward nature of the law itself." Such an antinomian Gnosis is shown in the system of Carpocrates and his son Epiphaneus. While the early fathers have accused the Gnostics of the most unbridled licentiousness, others have characterized them as imaginative rather than practical fanatics, as indulging a mental rather than a corporeal license. The truth is, their doctrines were calculated to produce the very opposite sentiments and effects, according to the disposition and natural temperament of those who held them. As we have repeatedly seen, the greater part of the Gnostics looked upon it as constituting the unhappiness of the soul to have been associated with a body which they universally held to be malignant, as being terrestrial. They imagined that the more the body was extenuated, the less effect it would have in corrupting and degrading the mind and the nearer they would rise to the Primal Father. But some of them deemed that there was no necessity, as there could be no advantage in attempting to correct the propensities of that nature which was especially evil and malignant. Such of them as were of a voluptuous character considered the actions of the body as having no relation to the state of a soul in communion with God. While it might pursue uncontrolled its own innate and inalienable propensities, "the serene and uncontaminated spirit of the pneumatikoi, who were enlightened by the divine ray, might remain aloof, either unconscious or at least unparticipant in the aberrations of its grovelling consort." The charges brought by some against them may have been rather severe in some instances, still we must see that their whole system had a tendency to produce laxity of morals. The dreamy indolence of mysticism is the most likely to degenerate into voluptuous excess. The excitement of mental has often a very strong effect upon bodily exertion. That this was the case with at least some of these sects and that it is the tendency of the doctrines of all of them, the evidence is too strong to disbelieve—the tendency is undoubtedly such as to justify the language which the heathen philosopher, Plotinus, makes them speak: "Nothing is left for us here, except to give ourselves up to our desires, and to despise all the laws of this world, and all morals, for there is nothing good to be found in this abominable world."

Such, in its leading features, was Gnosticism, a system which was disseminated with the greatest activity by its converts, and which produced so fatal a misapprehension of the divine nature and moral attributes of God, and consequently