

THE ORGANIC UNITY OF CHRISTENDOM

"The East, the West, together bind,
In love's unbroken chain;
Give each one hope, one heart, one mind,
One glory, and one gain."

For many years, both in England and America, the solution of this momentous question—the unification of all religious bodies into one Holy Catholic Church—has engrossed the attention of thoughtful Christians; and the prayers of the faithful at the present time, no less fervently than in the past, ascend to the Throne of Grace that God may, in His own good time, and by His good Spirit unite us, who acknowledge one Lord and Giver of all good things, to whom our prayers and praises ascend, "in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life;" that the time may shortly come when we shall all "hold the faith in unity of spirit."

And not only by Churchmen has the desire been felt to bring about such a fusion, but by many now outside the pale of the Church; and this happy consummation is hoped for—although seldom expressed in words—by all who realize its true significance. To Churchmen who are at all cognizant of the signs and tendencies of the age, no period has held forth brighter hopes of a successful issue than does the present. In the United States—a field peculiarly adapted to the working out of this problem—a recent impetus has been received in the right direction. What, for the most part, must form the real basis of an *organic union* has been fairly, and with an unprejudiced mind, set forth. By many, it has been conceded, the basis must not be merely one of sentiment and of opinion, nor even one of a common liturgical worship, but one that includes the three-fold ministry of the Apostolic Succession—a ministry of Divine origin. Without this it is impossible for us to suppose that the great Western, Eastern, and Anglican Churches would consider any scheme for unity. Of all concessions Dissenters would have to make, this appears to be one of the most important, as it would depose their present Ministry, unless they submitted to an ordination from a duly consecrated Bishop. To some it will rise as an insurmountable obstacle—an obligation with which Denominational Ministers will refuse compliance—for, as is natural to suppose, it will be they who would most strenuously oppose, and by their influence move their people in the same direction.

But without, at present, going further into a consideration of those matters which it would be our province to discuss in this connection, let us ascertain what attitude we should assume towards the movement, what the advantages to be derived from such a union would be, and what are the prospects for a happy consummation.

It is the duty and privilege of us all to strive towards this end, using those means which shall appear to be warranted by the requirements of the case and the exigencies of the times in which we live, asking that our efforts may

be guided and blessed by the Holy Spirit. The bringing about of this desired state must not and cannot be hurried. The danger is imminent if rash or forced measures are resorted to. The want of such unity must be more keenly felt than at the present; the desire in the hearts of all for that strength which comes only from union, to fight against the common foe must *grow*. Have we not assurances when we say that the seed has already germinated, and that in good soil, in the hearts of many earnest Christians? Like in all great movements, time is an important factor, and one which can hardly be over estimated.

Discussing this question from a Church of England point of view, it will not serve us to admit that the sects (many of whom are moving in this matter, though more or less unconsciously perhaps) are in the same position as regards orthodoxy as ourselves, for then it would be natural for them to reply, why not let the present state of Christendom continue to exist? Neither, on the other hand, must we blind ourselves to the fact that much of what is good exists in their creeds, nor that we are not infallible, or that some measures of reform in our own church are not needed; but rather in a liberal spirit, and for the promotion of God's Glory, urge a consideration of the tenets and practices of the Primitive Church when in its purity and infancy, not forgetting, however, to become better acquainted with the lessons to be drawn from the sociology of to-day; thus practically applying the one through the interpretations of the other. And specially should all this be the easier to us who have learnt the doctrines of the English Church—a church characterized at once by her definiteness and broadness.

The day of fanaticism and bigotry is on the wane, and we must be careful that our joy at seeing this leads us not to that liberty of thought and practise in things Divine, which not rightly discriminating between essentials and non-essentials, may finally hurl its victims by its delusiveness into an abyss of doubt—it may be to infidelity itself. Without definite fundamental principles and doctrines, no system could withstand the assaults of the Evil One; but let us take care that the "love of Christ constraineth us" in all things, and that all narrowness of mind and old prejudices—so hard to eradicate—be laid aside when contemplating and endeavouring to carry out this noblest of works.

Can we realize the great advantages of such an union? We can to some degree, but certainly not in the fullest sense yet. Taking a lesson from the commercial world (and why should we not), do we not learn that great strength is obtained by union, when the thousand act as one in the same cause, by the same means, for the same object. Innumerable instances might be cited from past history and that of our own day which portray in vivid colors how this principle of union, of concerted action, in all the walks of life, has been a factor of no small importance either for good or evil. Shall we sneer at it? Can we afford to overlook it? No; rather let us consider a