

HOW WE ARE NEARING CHURCH UNION IN SCOTLAND

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In two ways have the proceedings of the recent General Assemblies in Scotland been described. They have been regarded as "momentous," and they have been spoken of as "surprising." The reference in each case is to the decisions which have been come to with regard to the subject of "Church Union." Those who know the ecclesiastical and religious situation in Scotland today feel that nothing is more desirable than that the forces of the Presbyterian Churches should be united; and those who have watched for some years the procedure of the General Assemblies of both the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church have noted with intense pleasure the recently changed attitude of the one Assembly towards the other.

In order to enable readers of the *Westminster Hall Magazine* to understand decisions which have made both of the recent Assemblies so "momentous" and so "surprising" it might be well to give a brief resume of procedure. As far back as 31st May, 1878, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland communicated with all the Scottish Presbyterian Churches "of common origin, faith and worship" with regard to possibilities of union. The replies in each case, to say the least of it, were discouraging. In 1886, another attempt was made, but it came to nothing. During 1894-5 a conference of distinguished church leaders was held several times and some important proposals were put forward—notably one by the late Professor Calderwood upon somewhat of the lines that are now being followed. Those who have read the Life of Professor Charteris will have observed how deeply anxious the good Professor was for union, and, how, for years, he had been corresponding with men like Dr. Taylor Innes for the bringing about of this. When the Conference of 1895 was dissolved it was Prof. Charteris who suggested that it should be called together again, "if and when expedient." It was not, however, until 1909, when he was too ill to champion the cause of union himself, that the late Dr. Scott of St. George's Parish Church, Edinburgh, seconded by Dr. Norman MacLeod, moved in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that a committee of one hundred ministers and laymen of the Church of Scotland should meet with a similar committee of the United Free Church in "unrestricted conference"