

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSDR. DU VAL ON THE QUESTION
OF UNION.

Editor Dominion Presbyterian:

Your issue of the 19th ult. brings from Mr. Dobson a reply to my previous examination of his letters on Church Union. Have coned it carefully. Under a slightly changed form it is a going over of old straw previously threshed out. It must, therefore, be frank enough to say it is not the importance of the letter, so much as the cause of Union itself, which is exposed at present to much misrepresentation, that calls my attention. He says his previous letters were not written for the purpose of provoking controversy, and he will not now enter into "any further argument except so far as may be necessary to remove Dr. DuVal's dark suspicion." This is pointless padding. I exhibited no suspicion; simply repelled an unworthy charge in a direct manner. "Did not mean to provoke controversy." Did he wish to give out a nasty insinuation about the Union Committee, and have it sweetly passed over to his quiet gratification? Mr. Dobson ought to know enough about the spirit of moral philosophy to perceive the meanness of such a course. Every Knight called to his antagonist to draw his sword, before attacking him. But here is a Christian minister who makes an attack in the hope that his brother will make no defence. Such divinity will have credit with noble humanity. He only wrote, he says, to "express his humble protest against a movement which he believed to be unwise and hurtful." Had he stopped with his "humble protest" it would have passed in quiet for its full weight of influence, but he went on to attack the morality of the Committee, a body of the Assembly's choice—a body distinguished for high moral sense. This formed no part of a respectful, much less a "humble protest."

Mr. Dobson was not going into any "further argument." But he goes on to reiterate his "idea" already answered, about the course being "revolutionary." Does he understand the meaning of the words he uses? Dear Mr. Editor, we beg pardon for length, but it is impossible to be brief, when one has to educate his opponent in terms. The essential idea of revolution, governmentally considered, does not consist in change, but such change as is not in accordance with law and orderly procedure. Now in this case we can show, and it ought to be patent to one educated in Presbyterian polity, that the Assembly has acted according to law and orderly procedure. If this is not so, why have not the Presbyteries sent in their protests against its unconstitutionality, and had the case tried before the Supreme Court? And why have so many succeeding independent Assemblies approved the action? Mr. Dobson puts himself in the seat of an absolute "Law-Lord" and gives his dictum that the course of procedure should have been different, that the people should have been consulted before the General Assembly took any step. Mr. Dobson is spinning a new Presbyterianism out of his imagination. He is outleaping Congregationalism in democracy. He asks some one to cite from the Constitution specific words of authority for such a course, and examples from history in church or state of similar procedure. Before entering upon this task, let me ask Mr. Dobson, first, to cite a single example from the history of Presbyterianism where his course has been followed.

Now as to verbal authorization from the Constitution for acts of administration, if Mr. Dobson were a student of the philosophy of government, he would know that the Constitution is a body of fundamental principles with which all regulative procedure must

harmonize. The regulative function of Government must meet all accidents and exigencies of ever changing life, think out ways and means of meeting them, and, at the same time, see that its procedure does not contravene the fundamental principles of the Constitution. To ask, therefore, for verbal authorization in a Constitution, for regulative steps in meeting unforeseen necessities, manifests childish ignorance. No set of men in drafting a Constitution can see to the end of the ages, and provide for every exigence that may arise. It is enough to give the great principles, in accordance with which regulative wisdom is to proceed. Civil Constitution cannot provide for the exact kind of food, nor the quantity, nor the time of each man's breakfast. It must content itself with the fundamental principles that he must not wrong his neighbors in getting his breakfast, nor himself by suicide in over-eating; but the quantity, quality, time, etc., must be accommodated, mutated, mutandis, to each one's ability, taste and convenience.

In Presbyterian Government the Constitution is an embodiment of the fundamental principles that constitute the Presbyterian body, nothing can be added to it without the consent of a majority of the Presbyteries. But the conformity or non-conformity of acts of procedure thereto, may be passed upon by a gradation of Courts attaining finality in the General Assembly, sitting as the Supreme Court.

Now we will go on to satisfy Mr. Dobson's cry for precedents also. Precedents are not necessary to sanction right reason; some great souls had to move first. But there are numerous precedents of similar proceeding. He calls for them in state and church. One feels provoked to say that if Mr. Dobson had given a little more time to this kind of study, he would not have passed my previous declaration by as a mere "opinion;" and he would not have subjected the indulgent Editor and myself to the necessity of drawing out at length such an array of primer facts. For "we presumed the Court knew some law." If Mr. Dobson is acquainted with the philosophic historians Hume and Bancroft, he will have learned from them, that the polity of the great Republic of the United States is an offspring of Geneva. So soon as the Declaration of Independence of the Colonies was adopted, and while they held themselves to be independent of the Continental Congress; for when Great Britain acknowledged their independence, it was in severalty, each as an independent colony or state; but even under these conditions, the Continental Congress set about preparing a "form of Confederation." It did not appeal directly to the people of the respective colonies. The representatives of the people in Congress assembled, appointed a Committee to draft articles of Confederation to bind the colonies in organic Union, which were afterward recommended to the respective colonies for adoption.

The Old School and New School Presbyterian bodies of the U. S. came together on this wise. At the O. S. Assembly in Newark, N. J., 1854, a number of ministers and elders in attendance, had a notice read by the moderator, calling an informal gathering of all favorable to union. These loving souls passed a resolution favorable to union, they continued to foster the spirit of it, and practically worked to get both assemblies to meet two years later, 1856, in St. Louis. Here without any consultation of the people or Presbyteries, a joint committee was appointed by the two assemblies, to which the whole subject of union was given in charge. That joint committee labored for three years longer, and in 1859, five years from the beginning of the movement, each of the ne-

gotiating assemblies endorsed the work of the joint committee, and the union was consummated with the most glorious outflow of Christian love. Some few, here and there, criticized the committee, not regarding the troublesome task, but at the consummation in Pittsburg, most cordial and entirely unanimous thanks of the great united body were voted "the joint committee through whose labor of love, by the blessing of God, this great and glorious result has been brought about." Presby. Encyclopedia, page 1224. And in the fulness of their united loving zeal they proceeded to raise \$5,000,000 as a thank offering, for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Here was pure Presbyterian government—a great forward movement by the representatives of the people. Is Mr. Dobson acquainted with the history of his own church? Is he aware that the course he insists on, was not taken when the Union of 1875 was consummated? The question of that union was raised by individuals within the Supreme Courts of the different churches, dealt with by those courts or joint committees, and it was only after the Supreme Courts of the various bodies approved the committee's findings, were they sent down to Presbyteries, sessions and congregations. Similar procedure you observe in Scotland and now a similar course is being taken by the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in Australia. Your patience, Mr. Editor, will not suffer any further specification.

When Mr. Dobson, therefore, makes the surprising declaration, that the General Assembly is departing, in this case, from the usual course of conserving the rights of the Presbyteries and people, he is, ignorantly I am sure, imposing upon those who are not acquainted with the facts. Following the usual course so soon as the assembly got its work into intelligent and approved shape, has it not sent it down to Presbyteries? Did he wish the assembly to send down inchmeal matter? And as to the people generally, has not the assembly by year had the report of its committee printed and sent freely to pastors and sessions and sent freely to those who are not informed? And have they not invited suggestions to help make the basis of union to be offered to the people, as worthy as possible? If any set of men ever worked to know what was wise, ever worked to know what was safe, and what they have obeyed the commissions of the Presbyteries is Assembly convened, at every step. In all these premises, therefore, to talk of the "full authority being put into the hands of a Committee to treat for the obliteration of the Church, without the voice of a Presbytery" is an extravagant, petulant, ignorant use of language, involving injurious falsity, seeing now that all the work guided by the representatives of the Presbyteries goes down to the Presbyteries for their disposal. And finally, Mr. Dobson "protests against the whole movement as unwise and hurtful without compensating advantage." "At least he has no evidence of any advantage."

Where has Mr. Dobson been all these years of debate on the Union question? The first point decided by the high contracting parties was the "desirableness of the Union." From various speeches in the debate I have caught up these points:

1. That the Christian spirit required union of all believers in so far as there was no conscientious reason for separation.

2. That the field was large, and demanded a wise economy of the forces of the church to cover it.

3. That our present policy of overlapping and occupying each other's ground in denominational zeal, violated this economy and involved an un-