

UNION OF THE COLONIES

AND

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From the earliest period of American history no thought has more persistently occupied the minds of American statesmen than that of Union. The leading spirits in the old 13 colonies were ever dreaming of it, and when their union was accomplished after the revolution, it was not long before the loyal colonies began to think that they also had a common ground and bond of union.

For a long time these tendencies were discouraged by the mother country. The foolish policy which frowned on Franklin's plan was continued until the growing indifference to all colonies took root in England. The statesmen of the colonies still longed for organization, but the statesmen of the mother country followed the rule of dividing in order to govern, while there never lacked in any small community ardent local "patriots" who saw "tyranny and spoliation" in any comprehensive scheme, and who would rather be chiefs of their own villages than take their places, according to their real abilities, in a larger assembly.

The first union of which we read is the confederacy of 1643 of the "United Colonies of New England," by which they entered into "a firm and perpetual league" for defence and for trade. This confederacy soon fell to pieces, and in 1696 another and more comprehensive scheme was decided on and laid before the Board of Trade and Plantations, but was there suppressed. In 1754 a convention was held at Albany, and a plan of union devised by Dr. Franklin was selected out of many others, and, after a debate of 12 days,

adopted—Connecticut only dissenting. The Board of Trade refused even to bring this scheme under the notice of the King. The manner in which union was at last achieved is known to all.

Now it will be apparent to all who look under the surface, that had the British Government been able to communicate with a body of more weight and unity of action than the Provincial Assemblies, the rupture would not have occurred; for Lord North publicly asserted "that if the Americans would propose to Parliament any mode by which they would engage themselves to raise in their own way and by their own grants their share of contribution to their common defence the quarrel on the subject of taxation was at an end." But there was no common legislation, except that of the Imperial Parliament. One colony would grant and another would not—each was jealous of giving more than another, and the inevitable village demagogues were ready to set one against another and all against the British Government. Even after the Continental Congress had met, the matter would have been arranged had the Government been able to recognize it as a legal body. History is against those who assert that a Confederation of British North American Colonies would tend to separate them from the Crown—the rebellion of the old colonies took place under their disunited legislatures.

But beyond all the men who ever made a study of American politics the gaze of good old Governor Pownall penetrated farthest