

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

CHURCH UNION.

By Dr. J. M. Harper,

ARTICLE VII.

There is nothing, perhaps, which tends to ruffle the good nature of traditionized Anglicanism so readily as a questioning of the validity of Apostolic Succession as a valuable ecclesiastical asset nor has Presbyterianism towards any doubting of the sameness or sanity of each and every article of the Confession of Faith as formulated by the Westminster divines. There has even been a giving way at times to the frowardness of intolerance, whenever liberalism has made itself conspicuous in Methodism by an emphasizing strenuousness in its suggestions in behalf of creed revision or church reform. Nor otherwise may we expect it to be, should honesty of endeavour venture to locate a bit of neutral ground, whereon all may be allowed an open ear and a freedom of speech, while searching for a possible basis of union among Anglicans and non-Anglicans. Nay, in such a case, though intolerance, for decency's sake, may be brought to wear itself to take a back seat in a give-and-take treaty making of this kind, it may be unable to suppress altogether its inclination to discredit the "argumentum ad iudicium" even to the saying from *shewerock* of the "argumentum pro bono publico."

I have asked without the least bit of bias one way or the other, whether it be possible to locate such an area of neutral ground by any process of minimizing the color of the historic episcopate on one side, as a supposed saving health to the Anglican's church-ride, and by the naturizing of a non-Anglican consensus that is willing to recognize its ethical value as a status-quo assurance. I have also pointed out that in a fair-day give-and-take treaty making with respect to the consummation of union among Anglicans and non-Anglicans there is much to be held in abeyance by the one set of negotiators as by the other, namely a traditionized reality that has developed a sensitive of acceptance and a divinity of ordination that can only be assumed to have formulated an accepted reality. It cannot, therefore fail to be seen that in any endeavor to minimize the color of the doctrine of Apostolic Succession and its ceremonial and reality corollaries there must first be completely excluded any tendency to treat the traditionized intentions on either side with disrespect. There must be no invading away from the main intent of locating a consensus in order to advance an objection against what is by no means a bad thing to have nor a fundamental thing to keep. The main rationale in favour of such minimizing is really all that need be faced rather than an examination of the man—the very many arguments that have been advanced for or against what has been made too much of a business from both sides of the fence between Anglicans and non-Anglicans.

The whole question of the divine origin of the Anglican Episcopate involves a simple and direct appeal to Scriptural narrative. Is there to be found in that narrative any warrant issued by the Master in behalf of any single form of congregational organization or church government? The coming of Christ's native mission on earth was unopposedly against these human formal conventionalisms temporary and incidental that ever tend to misshape the truth as it is within the God-ordained man, or as it was in the mind of the Son of the God himself. It is therefore an assumption awaiting. I am afraid unattainable proof, for any one to say that Christ, in founding his church on earth, had in view some particular

form of church organization for any "two or three gathered together" in his name. The church he founded was to be a unit in its simplicity, and a simplicity in its communion. Its lack of ceremonial was to stand as a protest against all religious formalism with no warrant for the divisions to arise within it, beyond his foretelling that these divisions would come. How can we get beyond the record in this matter, however traditionized emotion may influence us? The Christian church is still one, held to be such as an article of faith and assurance, irrespective of the formalisms that have provoked divisions, formalisms which the founder of the church claimed throughout his whole earthly mission, to be deserving of opposition even to the facing of such persecution and death as was meted out to himself. Indeed there is left to us as coming direct from the Master, no record of what a church organization should or should not be. The scripture narrative gives us nothing that can be taken as a definite clue as to what ought to be the policy of any branch of the church of Christ. For one, therefore, to suspend judgment as to what ought to be the polity or organization of any new union church, there can be no betrayal of the spirit of reform as it was in the divine founder of the Christian church.

Nay, it is safe to assert, that the making too much of any traditionized emotion, provoked by a running after the conventional and formal which tends to perpetuate disintegration or hinder re-union in the Church of Christ, one and indivisible, is a direct over-riding of the Master's teaching and example—a direct challenging of the consistency of his public ministry—an indirect backing up of the passion of a once historic episcopate that put him to death. Nor can it be considered a sacrilege to locate in the words "In as much as ye have done it for the sake of the least of these," a warrant for a meantime suspension of all traditionized institutions that may stand in the way of a unified Christian Church—no sacrilege to plead for a meantime indifference to the formalism enjoined by any denominational polity, as a clearing of the way towards union between Anglicans and non-Anglicans.

No more is the New Testament narrative definite as to the shaving of a church organization under apostolic authority. The apostles favoured no organization as a permanence. Even the grades of church officials, mentioned in New Testament writ, have not been handed down to the present times in the evolution of an Anglican reality. Some of the titles attached to these officials have lapsed or been substituted by others. And I am afraid that such as the Rev. Dr. Ker of Montreal will find it difficult to frame an excuse for the dropping of any of these New Testament titles, unless by allowing that the sanction of the apostles has not been respected in full, or that their nominations were not intended to be looked upon as being beyond the "human temporary, and incidental," or to be pressed upon us as a divine guidance for all time.

Indeed, the closer the polity and church organization hinted at, as having been acceptable by the Apostles, is examined, the more convinced may one become, after a judicious refraining from indulging in the traditionized emotion that begets calcitrancy, of the lack of permanency in such church organization. There is nothing of the divine origin of creed or sacrament about it. It is a means to an end, the outer changing and changeable human incarnation of the gospel as applied to the needs of mankind, and it is undoubtedly within this area of a commonsense view, revealing as it does a lack of all complex

ity of organization, with no warrant about it of divinely inculcated permanency, that will enable the Anglican to suspend his church-pride, when he comes to negotiate in the fullness of time and evolution, for the widest union possible among our Protestant denominations in Canada.

And if it be necessary to fortify further the contracting parties in such a union, it ought to be remembered that the Apostles have had no successors. This is proven from the directly divine sanction of their Lord and Master. They were with him at the founding of his church. "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you," had in it no promise that their successors, Paul, Timothy, Titus and the early Fathers, were to be, or could be, invested with the fullness and finality of ministerial power which was thus directly and divinely bestowed upon them. The human and divine must not be thrown out of proportion by any traditionized emotion. The office of the "twelve" was unique, coming as it did with the fullest warrant of the divinity of the Master himself. And thus, even should Episcopacy have no break in the historic line of its bishops from apostolic times, it has a flaw in its divine warrant. In a word, the historic episcopate may prudently be set aside as being of no direct divine origin. It carries with it no divinely inculcated obligation. It is of the excellent but only human things we would be slow to part with or make a divinity of, either to obviate or further church unification. And thus it may safely—without sacrilege of any kind, be classed as temporary and incidental, in the light of a God-fearing attitude towards the union question. There is no sin in any one's wishing to retain it as an asset in the union, no more than there is a sin in any one's wishing to remove it as a stumbling block in the way of union; though, for all that, there seems to be more of a misdeedman in over-riding the intention of the Master as to the unity of his church, than in setting aside all that is human, temporary and incidental for the sake of union, even if in that temporary and incidental, there may be a valuable denominational asset.

James I of England coined his phrase of "No bishop, no king" to frighten the non-conformists of his time. But the cry of "No bishop, no church," has no such terror for the advocates of union who are sincere in their pleadings. There are few of us who are not aware of the wrangling there has been over the synonymy or lack of it in the terms "presbyter" and "bishop." The writer who would touch the controversy, or stir it up again, would be more than out of useful employment, indeed, whatever be the organization or polity decreed upon by any company of union negotiators, there must be church overseers or officials; and what does it matter whether these officials be called deacons, evangelists, presbyters, elders or bishops?

The title bishop, as is dignified for administrative purposes as any other, and loses nothing from having once meant the same as presbyter. And as far as the method of ordination for these church offices, high or low, is concerned there need be little or no obstacle in the way of union between Anglicans and non-Anglicans, if only the suggestion be acted upon, that the ordination of all present pastors of the contracting churches be accepted and that amended formulae for succeeding entrants into the ministry of the new united church, be left to the church courts of the new church for ample consideration. Indeed, as far as I can make out for myself, I see in the doctrine of Apostolic Succession and its ceremonial and polity corollaries no irremovable difficulty in the way of the very widest union.