

## UNION OF FREE AND UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES.

Sir George Sinclair of Uthor, Cathness Shire has appeared, by letters on Church questions, frequently before the Scottish public. Some time ago he fully and severely reviewed the position of the Church of Scotland, and withdrew from it and joined the Free Church. Now his object is to effect an union of the several unendowed Presbyterian Churches, and for this purpose he has published a long letter, addressed "To the Non-established Presbyterian Communities of Scotland." Last year he had corresponded with a number of ministers in the United Presbyterian and Free Churches on the subject, and all concurred with him in the object if it could be accomplished on honourable and satisfactory terms. He next, last February, invited a few of the leading men to meet to hold a conversation on the subject. By them he was encouraged, and now he brings it up in this letter, in an earnest, candid manner; and such as we imagine will cause not a little attention and hasten on "a consummation devoutly to be wished." He says,

"A junction with the Established Church, is, of course impossible, in so far as the United Presbyterians are concerned, and would, I think, even if practicable, be neither wise, salutary, nor honourable, in the case of the Free Church."

Again he makes a statement, with some truth in it, which will not please many ministers of his own communion; though we take it, it is one that the laity, to a very considerable extent, hold.

"It must, at the same time, I think, be admitted, that the Free Church at present occupies a somewhat anomalous, Mahomet-doffin-like position of suspension between the Establishment and the unestablished bodies, and must, I think, gravitate towards the one or other. We must either, like Abraham, dwell with our unendowed brethren in the wastes of self-sustaining independence; where they have built an altar unto the Lord, or we must lift up our eyes like Lot, and beholding all the plain of state endowment and privileged monopoly, that it is well watered everywhere, return to the Sodom of the Annuity-tax and the Gomorrah of the Court of Tendes."

Sir George evidently looks to two churches in particular as those that may be brought to unite; these are the Free and United Presbyterian. He proceeds to the first point, "Is it desirable?" and says that he found those he consulted showed "the most candid and decided unanimity." That point was satisfactorily settled. Now on the second, and main one, "Is it practicable?" he enters largely, and we think with no small show of feasibility. He gives extracts from two communications from two very eminent whole souled men, Rev. Dr. Guthrie Free Church, Edinburgh; and Rev. Dr. Harper, Leith, Professor to the United Presbyterian Church. Dr. Guthrie on being asked, is a union of the Free Church with the United Presbyterian practicable, replies in a style every way worthy of him.

"My great perplexity, Sir George, is to discover any grounds which can justify us in remaining separate; and if we could witness the accomplishment of such an union as you contemplate, I might well exclaim, with the ancient saint, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.'"

Dr. Harper's reply is next given, and we call special attention to it, because, by many, it is believed that voluntarism, or denial of the Scripturalness of the establishment principle is a term of communion with us. Hence it has been declared by members, clerical and lay, that Free Churchmen must become voluntarios, even theoretically, (for they are so practically already) before we can unite. In fact we ask of them what we have not done ourselves. An error two is made, by many; and we may here correct it. It is, that "The Testimony" is believed to, be one of the standards of our church. It never was.—And now since the union with the Relief Church we greatly err if it is not of less importance than it was before that auspicious event. Our standards are only and solely; first the *Supreme Standard, The Bible*: and second, the subordinate standards, the Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms: and the constitution, perhaps, in the ten articles of Basis of Union. Even the objectionable passages in the xliii chapter &c of Confession of Faith are not formally expunged. All that is asked on this head, from a minister at ordination is simply—referring to the Confession of Faith and Catechisms,—“it being understood that you are not required to approve of any thing in these documents which teaches, or is supposed to teach, compulsory or persecuting and intolerant principles in religion.” Thus a minister is “not required to ap-

prove,” that is all, but he may even approve and still, so far as the standards go, he is eligible for ministerial communion! We deprecate many will stare at this as something new; but it is the fact notwithstanding. We do not underrate voluntarism, as opposed to endowments: but that is not the question; this being it, looking at union, is there any thing in our standards that Free Churchmen on their anti voluntary or theoretical establishment principles could not fully adopt, and we, so far as our standards go, consistently uniting with them? We say there is not. But hear Dr. Harper:—

"So far as we are concerned, the question whether union is practicable is one which a United Presbyterian can without difficulty answer, so far as the constitution of our Church is concerned, seeing that we do not make the rejection of the Establishment principle a term of Christian or ministerial communion. In the United Church, there may be some who hold, and of course enjoy the liberty of doing so, the abstract principle of an Establishment, although the body, with very few exceptions, think differently. All that would be necessary is, that the Free Church should agree to make the point of difference a matter of forbearance. At the same time, it is obvious that union could not take place, nor, if practicable, would be permanent, so long as the Free Church has the intention, or entertains the expectation, of giving effect to her claim of right by reunion with the State."

We recollect that the Rev. Dr. King of Glasgow, when here on his visit to Canada, a few years ago, spoke earnestly of the propriety of union between the two churches in this country; and said, that he believed a union formed with us here, would greatly facilitate a union in Scotland. We doubt not that he was correct; though it should not be that the children should set the example to the parents. A few more Guthries and Harpers and Kings yonder and here, and the thing would be done at once: and not by either compromising; but by both forbearing; "forbearing one another in love."

## Original Articles.

### INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON PUBLIC MORALITY AND INSTITUTIONS.

The obligations under which the world has been laid to christianity are so great, and manifest, as not to admit of dispute. It has not merely banished the grosser forms of vice from the earth, and thus elevated man to his rightful position in the social scale; but, it has also revolutionised society, and left on it the impress of its own heavenly image. But we have been so familiar with christianity from the earliest period of our intellectual history; its self-denying morality, and its heavenly doctrines have been so thoroughly interwoven with our modes of thinking and feeling, that we are scarcely in a proper position to estimate the immense influence which it has exerted on society. It is only by contrasting the darkness and misery of heathenism with the enlightenment and happiness of christian lands that we can ascertain the practical influence of the gospel. But the political and social blessings conferred by christianity are confessedly great, even when the heart has not been renewed, and when society presents nothing better than the smooth surface of an outward morality. To such blessings, which have been erroneously attributed to our superior civilisation, we shall direct attention; and show that they are really the offspring of christianity.

When the gospel was first proclaimed, the most civilised nations of the earth were immersed in wickedness. The learned had lost all faith in the gods of their ancestors and were fast sinking into atheism. Some openly maintained that there were no gods; others affirmed that the gods were only mythological interpretations of the various powers and processes of nature; and even Cicero speaks of the entire subject as "a very obscure question," and as one "respecting which there are various and contradictory opinions among the learned." The mass of the people were entirely dissolute; especially since patriotism, the poor substitute for religion, had become extinct; the social virtue of chastity, so essential to the well-being of society, was almost unknown; so that from such a mass of moral putrefaction, it could easily be inferred that the Roman empire would soon be torn to pieces; or rather that its component parts would be resolved into a mass of repulsive atoms. There were no asylums for the destitute; no compassion for the poor; and no justice to the stranger. We can still survey the ruins of splendid temples, noble aqueducts, and magnificent palaces; but the foundations of an almost