

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

CHURCH UNION.

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Article VI.

It is next to impossible to make any definite reliable survey of the areas of traditionalized emotional prejudice which separate Anglicanism in Canada from the other Protestant denominations. The "odium theologicum" not only throws the surveyor's ethical instruments a little or a great deal out of a right adjustment, but the limitations of agreement or disagreement vary so from locality, and the units of measurement are so inconsistent and deemed so untrustworthy that, even from the hands of the most scrupulous polemic, the estimate is too often discredited. The bridge over or filling in of the acid areas, wit-in any given period, he comes, therefore, a problem which, if any afraid will have to be left for solution to the slow process of evolution rather than to the reformer.

After considering the meaning in possibility of a general Christian Union, referred to in my last article, the only pleading or prayer left to us, as it seems to me, is that which will show out, rather than retard the evolution making for eventual unification of our Protestant Church systems. In that article, I threw out a hint as to how a first step might be taken in this direction. Within "the altogether human, temporary and incidental," there may be found cases many hints of further steps to be taken, making for a coordination of good factors, beyond all calculations about denominational gain or loss, advantage or disadvantage. And it is needless to say that the initiative of making first advances, towards the unification of a common sympathy, must come from the Anglicans, in view of the church pride which has so long provoked resentment and which is more or less akin to the poverty that rots on air on the scene of birth, without being able to assume it.

And here, I may say, in view of all feeling of that church pride to the credit of the Historic Episcopate, that I offer no derogatory meaning to the term church pride. The credit of being a "good churchman" is all to any Anglican's credit, just as being a staunch Methodist or a loyal Presbyterian is to the credit of any member of the Methodist or Presbyterian Church. And if only Anglicans could bring themselves to minimize the assurance they have in the historic origin of their church pride, and non-Anglicans would allow that such assurance is not altogether groundless, the evolution towards Church Union between the two might be led into the way of the easiest road to travel. Is it possible, therefore, by any process of minimizing the credit of the doctrine of apostolic succession, on the one side, as a supposed saving health to the Anglican's church pride, and by a maturing, on the other side, of a consensus favoring that doctrine historic and status-giving value, to arrive at some bit of neutral ground, where wholesome sympathies, awakened by a previous interchange of pulpits and philanthropic co-operation in Christian work, may promote a right spontaneous desire for final union?

It would be a strange presumption on a layman's part, to attempt to say anything that is original on what has been appraised by the most of "good churchmen" as one of the most valuable assets any Christian Church may well have. The Roman Catholic Christian Church traces itself back to the sanction of apostolic times through

St. Peter its reputed first bishop; and the Anglican Catholic Christian Church has not altogether failed in tracing its origin back to a similar sanction, though the line of descent has not been altogether disentangled from the annals in part of the Roman Church in England. The pride of birth is a natural gift that makes for status in family or institution. It is held in common by men and denominations; and, being natural, it can hardly be a bad thing, when properly subordinated, to work a mischief among the humanities. The spirit of the age, presumably cosmopolitan and democratic, may think to sneer at it; but it is there all the same, with an ethical force within it of considerable value in the uplifting of mankind. It is not everything, but it is something which all men and churches would have, if they could only come honestly by it. The Anglican Catholic Church, it is presumed, has come as honestly by it as has the Roman Catholic Church; though in neither case ought it to be allowed as a canvass of contempt against the non-Episcopal Churches of Christendom, any more than it should ever be allowed to thwart the cooperative ethical forces of our common Christian civilization.

The non-Episcopal Churches of Christendom do not look upon the Historic Episcopate as an institution of divine origin, and possibly may never be able to do so. Church organization is with them a means to an end, under God's favor. It is the outer action in execution of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—seen, red to them as all Gospel precedences are—just as a creed is the inner passive incarnation of Christ's message. Both are developments within the area of "the human, temporary and incidental." There is nothing exclusive about either of them. The Greeks make a bill of Honor's works because Homer's works were to them a liter-ary embodiment of their religious beliefs. The Romans, through a dialectic reason, find the same organizations of these records and their worship valid; these were also a means to an end; there was nothing eternal about their sacerdotal formulas, as time has worn on. There were altogether organizations from within the area of "the human, temporary and incidental." And, if our Christian civilization is to be content with the centuries as something transcendental, surpassing the human civilization, with its manifold sorrows of vine and thistle, we must be even over-solicitous not to bury the credit of all church doctrine—the divine origin of Christ and His Gospel—by comprehending it or placing it on the same attitude with emanations from the "human, temporary and incidental," in the way that historic epochs and religious precedences have always been prone to throw the sacredness of things out of proportion.

The doctrine of apostolic succession is a church doctrine to be respected as a valuable asset for any church to have, whether it establishes the divine origin of the Church of England or not. Yet, to those who appreciate the eternal breadth of the Gospel itself, it should never be made to stand as a barrier to the free right of the closest association, in the name of the Master, of all Christian bodies. With Anglicans, the historic links, identifying the origin of their church,—incomplete, or assuringly pieced together into one chain, as the case may be thought out—have become sacred things. But an historically sacred thing is no longer

a sanctity if it discounts in any way the most divinely sacred of all truths—the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men. In a word, any historic warrant for denominational exclusive aggrandizement that would usurp the universal divine warrant for the simplest form of church organization and ceremonial, as an outer active incarnation for the Gospel, is a challenge to the Saviour's own promise-mandate, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them." And may it not be asked, by reversing the proposition for the sake of emphasizing it: Are not these words of the Master a challenge to the professionalism that would not dispense with a ribbon from the ceremonial of a bishop's parade, to make them good in any special exercise for simpler forms of worship, by way of advancing the cause of Christian Union on a purely Christian "Sermon on the Mount" basis? To be discreet, one would hardly care to issue or accept such a challenge at the present time in case he should be charged, as Dr. Simonds has been, with setting the heather on fire. The same thing has been asked hundreds of times. And yet the "communion of the saints" on either side of the doctrinal fence of apostolic succession has yet to develop a Christian Church organization, one and indivisible to satisfy the needs of a common Christian brotherhood.

In the interests of the Union movement, now that three churches have invited two churches to discuss the question of unification, can there be looked for a minimizing of the importance of this doctrine of apostolic succession and its corollaries of organization? Granted that the line of Anglican Catholic bishops can be undoubtedly traced back to apostolic times as the line of Roman Catholic bishops can be traced back to St. Peter, can the Anglican's church pride in as far as it has had its origin in the remoteness of his church's birth, be set aside, temporarily, in presence of the general urgent desire for union among the Protestant churches of Canada, as may the Presbyterian's church pride in the organization which was fostered by John Knox, or the Methodist's church pride in the organization that was instituted by John Wesley? I believe that it may safely be thus set aside, temporarily, if you will, if only these be kept in view the convergence of the common sense in what is supposed to be the will of God and the common sense in the needs of mankind. Canada, as a consolidating Christian nation, has more need of Christian Union, in whole or in part, during its present historic crises of developments, than of any doctrine of apostolic succession, with its varying historic color direct from St. Peter or St. Timothy, or through John Knox and John Wesley from the laying on of hands.

Nor is there the faintest shred of unseemliness in my mentioning the above names in one and the same breath. There is the most assured historic proof that John Knox and John Wesley both had to do with the institutions of a church organization that has thrown a justifiable air of sanctity around their names and personalities; while it is only by building "assumption upon assumption" that any of the apostles can be shown to have ventured authoritatively to lay down any line of polity for the earliest churches of Christendom, that was intended to be any more permanent than the Presbyterian or Methodist polity. If in the one case, the institution of a church polity has