

The PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE JOURNAL.

VOL. VIII.—JANUARY, 1888.—NO. 4.

Symposium, ON THE QUESTION OF CHRISTIAN UNITY.

Rev. W. I. Shaw, LL.D.

WHY is there so general a demand for the union of the various evangelical churches? That the demand exists cannot be denied and that it is becoming increasingly peremptory is manifest to any one who studies the changes of the great impulses of humanity. It is of interest at the outset to enquire what is the origin of this union sentiment. Writers of historical theology like Hagenbach, Shedd, Klieforth, Sheldon and Krippen all make their chronological divisions to include a period following the Reformation, frequently called the Systematizing Period, in which Protestantism seemed to have its attention almost entirely absorbed with the structure of creeds. This extends from 1517 to about 1720. In the interval between the Reformation and the Wesleyan Revival which was preeminently marked by Catholicity, the importance of doctrinal definition was so exaggerated that in the battles of the creeds, catholicity of spirit was almost forgotten. This creed conflict, succeeded by and coupled with the liberalism and democracy of subsequent history, led to the condition of things which has since confessedly been a reproach to Protestantism, namely, the appalling increase of the number of sects. Given the two elements of narrow intolerant doctrinal tenacity and the self assertion of social and political liberalism, and you have the most prolific soil for the growth of sectarianism and so the century from 1750 to 1850 may appropriately be called the Period of Sec-