

CHRISTIAN UNITY.

By REV. HERBERT SYMONDS, M.A.

When I went to college, I very well remember a piece of advice given to my class in regard to the construction of a sermon. After having chosen text and subject the preacher was recommended to ask three questions about it, viz., What, Why, and How. I think I cannot do better in this short paper on Christian Unity than attempt to answer the three questions, changing however their order, "Why should we desire Christian Unity?" "What is the Christian Unity to be desired?" and "How is it to be attained?"

(1) Our first question may be treated under two heads (a) theoretical, (b) practical. The theoretical reason why we should desire Christian Unity is because a much closer union than exists to-day between Christian people is clearly of the will of Christ, and of his inspired apostles. In one of the most solemn moments of His life our Lord prayed for his disciples that they might be "sanctified in the truth," and then he continued, "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that thou didst send me." (St. John xvii. 20, 21.) Through the unity and fellowship of those who believed in Christ the world was to be brought to acknowledge His claims.

So too St. Paul in the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians and in the 4th chapter of the Ephesians, clearly sets forth the unity of Christian people. The Church, that is the company of believers, is compared to the human body. "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of the body being many are one body, so also is Christ. For in one spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink one Spirit." And in Eph. iv, he exhorts his converts to give "diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." For he says, "there is one body, and

one Spirit even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Then he proceeds to describe the ministers of the Gospel who had been given to the Church, and these were to be the means through which the body of Christ's faithful might at last "attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, . . . from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in one measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love."

(b) Amongst the practical reasons for desiring Christian unity may be mentioned the following:

The work of the Church would be more effectively done. This is sometimes questioned, but in the new circumstances of modern society a greater measure of unity is urgently needed. The tendency of the times is toward the massing together of men in large cities. There is, too, within the cities a continual shifting of the population. It becomes increasingly difficult, in consequence, for the various Churches to keep in touch with its members. As a proof of this the following experiment is conclusive. The twenty-first assembly of the City of New York has a population of some 50,000 to 60,000 people. A Christian unity movement known as the "Federation of Churches" has issued in a practical work. Members of the various Churches represented in that district (which is neither very rich, nor very poor) met together, and decided to make a house to house visitation of the whole assembly.

As a result of this visitation it was found that 46 per cent. of the Protestant population were without any church connexion, and were drifting into a condition of civilized paganism. On the other hand only 14 per cent. of the Roman Catholic population was unconnected with any congregation. The field is so vast, the changes so numerous, that an annual house to house visitation is almost a necessity. But

it is impossible for half-a-dozen different denominations to canvass a territory so densely populated.

Another result of this work was that one church alone added to its membership no less than 174 families. The movement has proved so successful that it is being applied to other parts of the city of New York, and there is some talk of forming on similar lines a National Federation of Churches of the United States.

But not only would the work of the Church be more effectively done in the large cities, but also in the country places. There are scores of villages of from 500 to 1000 inhabitants, where there are to be found three, four and sometimes five churches, each supporting or pretending to support its own minister, each working in almost entire independence of the other. What a waste of men, of money, and of energy! What rivalries, jealousies, competitions, often suppressed but not extinguished, destroy the purity of the work that is done! What subtle plans are devised to fill one's own church, even though it be at the expense of another. How often a greater joy over the conversion of a Methodist into an Anglican, or vice-versa, than over the one sinner that repenteth! How often praise and promotion go to him who is the most successful in the work of proselytizing!

And yet again, with how much greater success could the work of converting the world from heathenism to Christ be accomplished if with united mind the plan of the missionary campaign was designed, and with united voice and united effort it was carried into effect?

2. Such are some of the answers that may be given to the question, "Why is Christian Unity to be Desired?"

Our second question is "What do we mean by Christian Unity?"

Now there is no use in disguising the fact that various answers are given to this question. For the answers which I shall give no one is responsible but myself.

In the first place it is perhaps easier to say what Christian Unity is not than what it is. It is not *uniformity*. It does not mean that the centre of unity is to be found in an