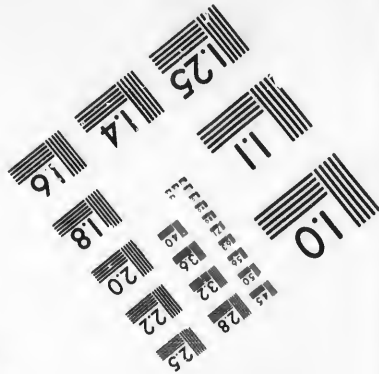
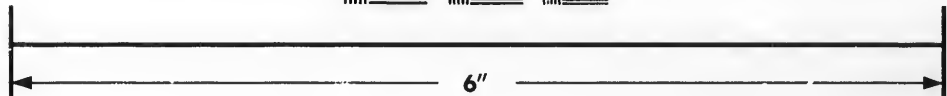
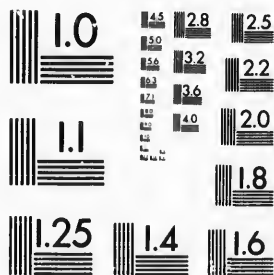


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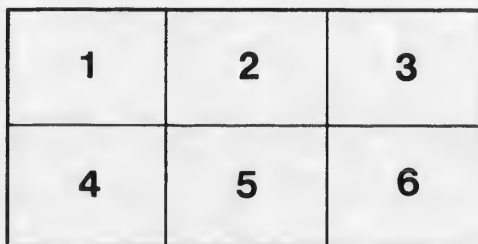
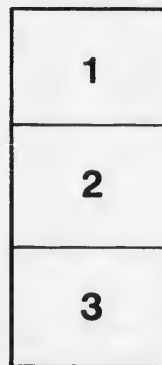
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CHRISTIAN UNITY.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. GILES'S CHURCH, EDINBURGH,
JULY 3, 1877.

AT THE OPENING

OF THE FIRST

GENERAL PRESBYTERIAN COUNCIL,

— BY —

ROBERT FLINT, D.D., LL.D.,

PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

Published by Request of the Council.

MONTREAL:

A. A. STEVENSON, PRINTER, 245 ST. JAMES STREET.

1878.

PREFATORY NOTE

BY THE AUTHOR.

THE circumstances in which this Discourse was preached may give it to many an interest to which it is not entitled by any merits of its own. It formed a part of the religious exercises at the opening of the proceedings of a Council composed of delegates representing the whole family of the Presbyterian Churches throughout the world.

The author has been honoured by the Council with a request to publish his Discourse. The request, he need scarcely say, cannot be reasonably supposed to commit the members of the Council to an approval of all the particular statements contained in the Discourse. He feels confident, however, of being at one with all his brethren in the desire that not only may the Presbyterian Churches be drawn more closely together, but that all who are united to Christ by faith may become more united to one another in love.

Edinburgh, July, 1877.

NOTE.—It was intended to have published this Sermon in the PRESBYTERIAN RECORD some months ago. The limited space of that Magazine, however, preventing, the publishing Committee have taken this method of furnishing the Ministers of THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA with a copy of this Discourse, which, apart from its intrinsic value, has attached to it a historic interest by reason of the great occasion on which it was preached.

Montreal, July, 1878.

S E R M O N .

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."--JOHN. xvii. 20, 21.

TH E S E words contain truths and suggest reflections which are manifestly appropriate in the circumstances in which we are met. Any remarks which may help you to enter into the spirit and meaning of them cannot be other than reasonable. Let Christ himself, therefore, be our teacher; let the speaker merely repeat what he taught: and may the Holy Spirit guide both speakers and hearers to a right understanding and a hearty reception of what he taught; and may the truth thus understood and received be profitable unto us for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

The circumstances in which the words of the text were first spoken could not have been more fitted than they were deeply to impress the truth in them on all Christian hearts and consciences, throughout all lands and ages. When our Lord breathed them forth in prayer, He had just instituted the ordinance which was to commemorate, until He come again, His own death. He had immediately before His view the cup which His Father had prepared for Him to drink, the agony of Gethsemane, the sufferings and the shame of Cavalry; yet with Divine unselfishness his thoughts were occupied about others, and His affections were going forth towards others. He was doing what he could to comfort, to encourage, to enlighten the few sorrowful, perplexed, disheartened men who were beside Him, and whom He was so soon to leave. But His care and His love were not confined to them, or to the small number of persons scattered through

Judea who had trusted that He would redeem Israel, and whose affections were still not wholly withdrawn from Him, although their hopes were overclouded or extinguished. He knew that the doubts and fears of His disciples were, as far as they regarded Himself, altogether vain. He knew whence He came into the world, and why He came—who sent Him, and for what He was sent; that His work was one which could not fail; that the Father would glorify the Son, that the Son might glorify the Father; that the Father had given him power over all flesh; that He should give eternal life to a mighty people gathered out of all the nations of the earth. He knew that the honour of God and the salvation of men were alike dependent on the success of what He had undertaken. He looked, therefore, beyond the apparent defeats and passing sorrows of the present, and beyond the sufferings of the immediately impending future, and He saw that despised Gospel which He was about to seal with His blood, spreading beyond Judea, beyond the farthest bounds of Roman rule, over lands whose names His contemporaries knew not. He saw that it was to outlive empires, the foundations of which had not then been laid—to destroy whatever was opposed to it—to pass through the strangest vicissitudes of thought, as gold through the fire—to diffuse light and life through all the coming ages. He saw it gaining to God and to Himself the countless multitudes of the redeemed; and His loving heart embraced them all, and out of the fulness of His heart He prayed for them all; and His prayer was "that they all might be one."

In praying thus, He asked, we may be sure, the very best thing for them which he could. He had already on that memorable night bequeathed to His followers His

great gift of peace ; He had laid on them His new commandment, "Love one another ;" and now he asked for them what included both—that unity which could only be obtained through obedience to His law of love, and which was inseparable from such peace as He had to bestow.

But that we may know the worth of what He asked on our behalf, we must know what it really was. Its nature has often been grievously misunderstood, and the consequences have been most lamentable. In every sphere of thought and life there is a serious danger of taking a false unity for the true. The aim of all philosophy, for example, is to reach a true intellectual unity, and the love of unity is its very source and life : yet it has also been the chief cause of its errors ; and all false systems of speculation, like materialism and idealism, positivism and pantheism, are simply systems based on false unities—on narrow and exclusive unities. There is a unity of political life which is rich in blessings ; and there are caricatures of that unity which have only originated cruel and perfidious acts, foolish and unjust measures. But nowhere have erroneous views as to the nature of unity been so mischievous as in the province of religion. In the name of Christian unity men have been asked to sacrifice the most sacred rights of reason, conscience, and affection. Independence of judgment, honesty, brotherly love, and every quality which gives to human nature worth and dignity, have been treated as incompatible with it. In former days it was thought that Christian unity could be forced upon men, with violent and bloody hands ; and in later times it has often been supposed that it could be promoted by wrathful words and the arts of worldly intrigue. Throughout the whole duration of the Church, the unity which our Saviour prayed that his followers might enjoy has been widely confounded with kinds of unity which have no necessary connection with Christian peace or love, and which have only proved the occasions of most unchristian discord and hatred.

What, then, is the unity which Christ prayed for, when he asked on behalf of His followers "that they all might be one ?" Well, this at least it certainly is—a unity of supernatural origin. It has its foundation not on earth but in heaven, not in man but in God. It is not of this world nor of the will of the flesh ; it is not a mere expression of the likeness of human nature in all men ; it has its root and source in the eternal nature of God—in the infinite love wherewith He loved us before the world was. It supposes a reception of the word or doctrine of the apostles regarding Christ, and, consequently, faith in Christ Himself as the God-man, the brightness of the glory and the express image of the person of the Father. It is the natural and necessary expression of the common relationship of believing men to the one God, the one Saviour, and the one Spirit. There is one faith, one baptism, one hope on earth, because there is one Father, one Redeemer, one Sanctifier in heaven. Unity on earth below is the result of a unifying work accomplished by God who is in heaven above, through redemption in Jesus Christ. Sin produced disunion. It separated men from God, and men from one another. Christ came to undo the work of sin, and to bind together more firmly than ever what it had torn asunder. Through faith believers are made one with Him ; through his sacrifice they are made one with the Father ; through being in the Father and the Son, they are one among themselves—one in faith and feeling—in spirit and life—in their principles and their sympathies, in their affections and aspirations.

Such, whatever else it may be, is Christian unity. But this of itself is sufficient to separate it by a broad and clear boundary, yea, by an enormous chasm, from a unity which is in the present day frequently set forth in opposition to it—the unity proclaimed and glorified by positivists, humanitarians, and socialists—the unity of mere human brotherhood. This is a comparatively new enemy of the faith. It may be said to have entered into general

history with the French Revolution ; it owes its very existence to the Christianity which it is set up to rival. But the signs of the times seem clearly to indicate that, under some form or other, or rather that under many forms, what has been called the religion of humanity—which is just the belief in the brotherhood of men separated from belief in the fatherhood of God—fraternity divorced from piety—unity detached from its supernatural root—will be one of the chief enemies which Christianity must contend with. Merely ecclesiastical questions will probably have far less, and social questions far more, importance assigned to them in the estimation of Christian men in the future than they have had in the past ; and all Christian Churches, it is to be hoped, will henceforth realise better than they have hitherto done that their duty is to conquer the world around them, and transform it into a part of the kingdom of Christ—to sanctify society, and to stamp the image of the Redeemer on all the relations of life. But in attempting to accomplish this task, Christian belief will assuredly be resisted by worldly unbelief ; and yet in such a struggle, the foe of Christianity, to oppose it with any chance of success, must be neither wholly worldly nor wholly unbelieving ; it must have some positive truth, some generous faith, some cause capable of eliciting enthusiasm. The world will not be conquered—not generally influenced and governed—by mere doubts, mere negations. But where is unbelief to get a truth, a faith, a motive which will serve its purpose ? I answer that unbelief, although so fertile in doubts and negations, is so poor as regards the positive truth which can alone support and ennoble life, that it must borrow it from the very system which it seeks to combat, and can have no other originality than that which it gains by mutilating the truth which it borrows. To the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, it will oppose the latter alone—to Christian unity, what it will call a broader, but what is really a narrower truth, a merely human unity—to the

whole truth, the half truth. And for many a long day Christian men and Christian Churches will have no more urgent work to do than to show by words and deeds, by teaching and conduct, what is the whole truth and what is only the half truth ; that the temple of human brotherhood can only be solidly founded and firmly built up on the Eternal Rock, on which rests Christian faith ; that the world can only be reconciled to itself by being reconciled to its God ; that human unity can only be realised in and through Christian unity.

The unity which Christ asked for His disciples is, I remark next, a unity which has not only its foundation, but its standard or model, in heaven. The prayer of Christ is not only that His people may be one, but “as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us.” The union of believers not only flows from the union between the Father and the Son, who is the Mediator between the Father and us, but should resemble it as much as the relationship between finite beings can resemble that between infinite beings. The unity which Christ came to produce on earth was one meant to reflect and express in a finite form the perfect unity of the Divine Nature. That unity, as Christianity has revealed it, is very different from the mere abstract unity of speculative philosophy—the wholly indeterminate unity of which nothing can be affirmed except that it exists ; very different also from the solitary, loveless, heartless unity of the God of Mohammedanism. It is a unity rich in distinctions and perfections ; the unity of an infinite fulness of life and love ; the unity of a Godhead in which there are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a trinity of persons, a diversity of properties, a variety of offices, a multiplicity of operations, yet not only sameness of nature and equality of power and glory, but perfect oneness also in purpose, counsel, and affection—perfect harmony of will and work. It is in this unity, in the contemplation and fruition of which poets like Dante, saints like St. Bernard, and divines like Melancthon, have supposed the highest

happiness of the blessed to consist, that we are to seek the archetype of the unity of believers on earth.

It is one of the most marked and one of the grandest characteristics of Christianity, that it continually sets before us the heavenly, the divine, the perfect, as the law and rule of our lives. As Mosès was commanded to make the tabernacle for the children of Israel in all things according to the pattern shown him in the Mount, so is the Christian commanded to frame his conduct in every respect according to the perfect model of heaven. To be perfect, as God is perfect—to do our Father's will on earth, as it is done in heaven—to love one another as Christ has loved us,—such is the uniform tenor of the teaching which we receive from the Gospel; and so here our Saviour's words remind us that we are to be one, as the Father and the Son are one. If, as those dream who would found a mere human brotherhood, heaven were empty, or wholly inaccessible to our faith—if there were no Father and no Son, or, at least, none to be known by us—if there were not in the Godhead itself an intimate indwelling of person in person, a perfect communion of spirit with spirit, an infinite love, all-comprehensive, all-pervasive, all-unitive,—would there be any real and adequate standard assignable to the unity of men with men, to the love of man for man? When one who disbelieves in God and His Son tells his fellow-men to be one, can he also reasonably and consistently tell them in what measure or according to what model they are to be one? No. He can find no rule in the history of the past, stained as that has been with hatreds and dissensions. He must not be content with merely pointing to good men, for clearly the best human lives have been very defective, and in many respects warnings rather than examples. If he say, "Love and be at one as far as is for the greatest good of all," he gives us a problem to calculate instead of an ideal which can at once elicit and measure, which can at once sustain and regulate love and unity. If he say, "Love and be at one as you ought,"

he forgets that the very question is, How ought we to love and be at one? Human unity is a derived and dependent unity, and its standard can only be the ultimate and uncreated source of unity—in the indwelling of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father.

The words of our Lord, I remark next, indicate to us not only the true foundation and the true standard, but also the true nature of the unity which he prayed for. What He asked was that all His followers might be "one in Us," one in the Father and in Himself—one in the Father through belief in Himself, which can only mean that what He desired was that His followers might all possess a common life—might all participate in the mind which was in Him—might all walk not by sight but by faith, not after the flesh but according to the Spirit—and might all consciously feel and outwardly manifest that they were thus really one. This is, of course, a kind of unity which embraces all Christ's followers without any exception. The Church of Christ, which is the body of Christ, contains every human being of whatever kind, or tongue, or nation, who has that life which is not of this world, but hid with God in Christ; and it contains only those who have it. Therefore the Church—the body of Christ—is one. It is one in itself, because one in its Lord; one in its many members, because these members are all united to Him who is the Head of the Church—the sole head of the Church. The Headship of Christ and the unity of the Church are two aspects of the same truth. Christ is the Head of the Church because He is the life of all, the guide of all, and the Lord of all, who are within the Church: their life, through the agency of His Holy Spirit; their guide, through the instrumentality of His Word; and their Lord, through the redemption of them from sin to His own blessed service. And just because Christ is thus the sole Head of the Church, in the plain Scriptural sense of this great doctrine, the Church itself is one. Without Him it would have no centre of unity, no coher-

ence of parts, no sameness of life, no harmony of sentiments, no commonness of purpose; while in Him it has all these.

Has them, I say, and not merely will have them. The unity of the Church is not simply a thing to be hoped for, prayed for, worked for; it is also a thing which already exists, and the existence of which ought to be felt and acted on. Christians are certainly far, far indeed, from being one, as Christ prayed that they might be one—completely one—one as He and the Father are one; they are far from that, because they are far from being perfect Christians; but in so far as they are Christians at all, they are to that extent already one. To be a Christian is to be—through change of nature, through newness of life—one with all other Christians. Now I know scarcely any truth about Christianity which we are more apt to forget, and which we more need to remember, than just this,—that Christian unity already exists as far as Christianity itself does; that we do not need to bring it into existence, but that Christ Himself by His work and spirit brought it into existence; that any unity which we are entitled to look for in the future must be merely a development, an increase of that which already binds together Christian men of all denominations—not something of an essentially different nature. The great duty of Christians in this matter, some seem to think, is to ignore their differences, to conceal them, or to get rid of them anyhow; they appear to find it difficult to understand how there can be a unity coexisting with and underlying differences, and wholly distinct from the uniformity which can only be gained by the surrender or suppression of differences. This is a very superficial view, for it represents Christian unity not as a living and spiritual thing at all, but as a mere dead outward form of doctrine or policy; it is also a very dangerous view, for it tends directly to the establishment of ecclesiastical despotism, the discouragement of the open expression of individual convictions, and the destruction of faith in the sacredness and value of truth. To me

it seems that the chief aim and desire of Christians as to unity ought to be to realize their oneness notwithstanding their differences; to estimate at its true worth what is common to them, as well as what is denominationally distinctive of them.

Christian unity does not require us to undervalue any particular truth, or to surrender any denominational principle, or even individual conviction, which is well founded: it merely requires that our minds and hearts be open also to what is common, catholic, universal; that we do not allow our denominational differences and individual peculiarities to prevent us from tracing and admiring the operations of the Spirit of grace through the most dissimilar channels. There may be Christian oneness where there are also differences which no man can rationally count of slight moment. The differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics are of the most serious kind, religiously, morally, and socially,—yet obviously the feelings to which St. Bernard gave expression in the hymn, "Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts," and those which Charles Wesley poured forth in the hymn, "Jesus, lover of my soul," had their source in the same Holy Spirit, and their object in the same divine Saviour. There is a great distance, and there are many differences, between the Roman Catholic Church of France and the Free Church of Scotland; but Fénelon and M'Cheyne were of one Church, the one true Church, because at one in their spiritual experience. St. Bernard and Pope Alexander VI., Fénelon and Cardinal Dubois, were united in the Church of Rome—who will dare to say that they were one in Christ? St. Bernard and Charles Wesley, Fénelon and M'Cheyne, were ecclesiastically far apart—who will dare to say that they were *not* one in Christ? I trust that Protestants will never think lightly of the differences which separate them from the Church of Rome; and yet I hesitate not to say that when Protestants in general are clearly able to discern the oneness even beneath these differences, and cordially to love whatever is of Christ

and His Holy Spirit, even when it appears in the Church of Rome, a greater step will have been taken towards the attainment of Christian unity than would be by the mere external union of all the denominations of Protestantism.

As to the differences between these denominations, they might surely exist and yet prove merely the means of exercising and strengthening Christian unity. If we can be at one in spirit with those only who agree with us in opinion, there can be little depth or sincerity in such oneness. The love which vanishes before a difference of views and sentiments, must be of a very superficial and worthless nature. And, as a plain matter of fact, it is neither merely nor mainly the differences of principle or opinion between the various denominations of Christians which mar and violate their Christian unity, but the evil and unchristian passions which gather round these differences. The differences are only the occasions of calling forth these passions. If they did not exist at all, the same passions would create or find other differences, other occasions for displaying themselves. It is not when one body of men holds honestly, openly, and firmly the Voluntary principle, and another the Establishment principle, that Christian unity is broken, but when those who hold the one principle insinuate that those who hold the other are, simply in virtue of doing so, ungodly men, or men who disown Christ as the life and guide, the Lord and Head of His people; when, instead of cordially acknowledging and rejoicing in what is good in each other, each exaggerates what is good in himself, and depreciates what is good in the other, or even rejoices in his neighbour's humiliation or injury; and when those who represent them contend, by speech or writing, in a manner from which a courteous and honourable man of the world would recoil;—it is then that Christian unity is broken—visibly, terribly broken—for then the Christian spirit is manifestly absent, or grievously feeble.

All the differences of principle which

separate most of our Christian denominations might redound to their common honour, and might reveal rather than conceal their common unity, had their members and spokesmen only a little more justice, generosity, and love—a little more grace and virtue—a little more of the spirit of that kingdom which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. They might set a high value on their distinctive principles, and yet rejoice that what they held apart was so small a portion of the truth in comparison with what they held in common. It may, perhaps, be quite reasonable that for the sake of one principle as to which they differ, two denominations shall stand apart, although on a thousand other principles they are agreed; but it cannot be reasonable that their divergence of view as to the one principle should shut their eyes and hearts to the fact that on the thousand others they are agreed. And yet there is, as all experience proves, a very great danger of our thus allowing distinctive principles to obscure or prevent our recognition of common principles. It is the penalty attached to all undue exaltation or glorifying of what distinguishes us from our Christian brethren. And met as we are as a General Presbyterian Council, I hope we shall be on our guard against such a danger. God forbid that the Presbyterian Churches of the world should have so little received the spirit or learned the law of Christ as that they should in any degree confound Presbyterian unity with Christian unity—or vainly boast of what is but an outward form—or say or do anything to hurt the feelings or the usefulness of other Churches which are as dear to the Saviour as themselves, and which are separated from them by so thin a partition wall as a mode of ecclesiastical government. We have come together as Presbyterians, but with the wish to promote Christian unity; and the very thought of Christian unity, if apprehended aright, must save us from unduly and offensively magnifying any secondary unity, any outward distinction.

Christian unity we have seen to be a spiritual unity which links together all Christians, and underlies all the differences which distinguish them from one another. It is a natural and necessary consequence of this truth that Christian unity, although it may lead to such secondary unities as identity of doctrine, or uniformity of ritual, or oneness of government, ought never to be identified with them. Christian unity may be where there are none of these things. It might not be where they all are. Take doctrine. Christian unity undoubtedly involves in its very essence a oneness of faith, for the Christian life is one of confidence towards God as a reconciled Father in Jesus Christ—a confidence which is gained through belief in Jesus Christ, while that belief is gained through assent to what Scripture testifies of Jesus Christ. This unity of a living faith naturally finds expression in a unity of doctrine or creed. God and Christ are one, and the testimony of Scripture regarding Him is a self-consistent whole, and the longer, the more impartially, the more freely and honestly, the more reverently and profoundly that testimony is studied, the more likely, or, if you will, the more certainly, is unity even of doctrine to be the result. And it has been the result. The harmony of the Creeds and Confessions, not of Presbyterianism alone, nor even of Protestantism alone, but of the whole Christian world, is most comprehensive. The harmony of the chief Protestant creeds and confessions is, of course, far more so; it shows us a unity of doctrine abundantly sufficient, surely, for almost every want of practical Christian life. This unity or harmony was inevitable, because no very different system of doctrines could be evolved out of the Scriptures by the collective labours of large masses of men one in spirit, than that which has been derived from them and embodied in the creeds of the Churches.

But while all this is true, and Christian unity thus naturally tends to produce a doctrinal unity, we must never confound these two things. A man may err very

widely in creed, and yet have a sincere believing soul. He may greatly misunderstand many an instruction of his Lord and Master, and yet reverence Him far more, and love Him far better—and therefore, since love is the fulfilling of the law, much more truly obey His will—than a wiser and more instructed brother, whose exegesis of the new Testament is perfect. A Church may have a faultless creed, to which all its members unhesitatingly assent, and yet be devoid of Christian unity, because devoid of Christian faith, of spiritual life. Mere orthodoxy is deadly heresy. The purely intellectual unity reached through a purely intellectual assent is no operation of the Spirit; but where the Spirit is not, life is not; and where life is not, death is. Life, however, is unity, and death is dissolution.

Besides, while Christian unity tends to doctrinal unity, there may never on earth be doctrinal identity. Wherever there is mental activity—free, honest, independent enquiry, such as there is wherever there is either intellectual or spiritual life—research is ever advancing; and the first results of advancing research into the meaning of either God's book of nature or His book of revelation are often discordant and unsatisfactory. There are conflicting opinions entertained on many questions regarding heat, light, and electricity; there are rival schools in geology and natural history; there is hardly a single subject in mental, moral, or political science about which there is not the greatest diversity of opinion. In all these cases, however, the continuance of free research will bring order out of chaos, harmony out of confusion; yet will the perfect order and harmony of nature be discovered and demonstrated only when science has fully comprehended nature, and there is no room left for fresh research. It is not otherwise with regard to revelation. We can only have an absolute harmony of opinion as to the Bible when there are no more new truths to be derived from it, or new questions raised concerning it, when its interpretation is perfected, and research re-

garding it completed. That will not be, I believe, before the day of doom. Certainly it will not be in our day, for never was Biblical research more actively pushed forward in all directions than just now. Never, therefore, were the Churches more bound, while conscientiously guarding old and assured truths, to beware of dogmatism as to new views, or of trammelling unnecessarily the advancing research. The free action of spiritual life in the form of investigation and criticism when displayed in fields hitherto little trodden, and in questions hitherto little studied by us, may apparently produce, or really produce, for a time, only contradictory and destructive theories,—yet in God's good time it will assuredly bring about unity and peace, and minister to faith and virtue, as it has done in fields already traversed and as to questions now settled.

It is thought by some that Christian unity—unity of spirit—also tends to ritualistic uniformity or uniformity of worship. There are two grounds on either or both of which this opinion may be maintained. It may be argued that there is a divinely appointed form of worship defined in the New Testament with sufficient distinctness, and that Christian men will sooner or later be all convinced of this, and will, of course, adopt that form of worship. It may also be argued that there is an absolutely best form of worship, and that when the spiritual life of the Church is sufficiently deepened and quickened it must assume that form as alone fully appropriate. And these two arguments may be combined; indeed, if there is a divinely-appointed form of worship it can scarcely be other than the absolutely best form of worship—the one most suitable in all lands, ages, and circumstances.

I have neither the time nor the desire to examine these arguments, but certainly I am unconvinced by either of them. I cannot see that there is one form of worship exclusively prescribed by Scripture and binding in all its regulations on men in all places and at all times; or that there is

ne absolutely best form of worship, identical and unvarying for all men, no matter what may have been the history, or what may be the characters or circumstances, of the worshippers. Hence, although I can hardly doubt that the more enlightened and earnest our piety becomes, the less value will it attach to accessories and imposing forms, the more suspicious will it grow of what is symbolical and artificial, and the higher will be its appreciation of those forms of worship which with the greatest simplicity, naturalness, and directness, bring the soul into contact with the realities of worship, I can feel no certainty that there would be uniformity of worship even if there were perfect unity of spirit; and I will judge no man's worship by my own ideal of its form. To his own master each man standeth or falleth. The unity of worship, which is all important, is not in its form at all, but in its being in spirit and in truth. The form is entirely subordinate to the spirit. The true spirit is restricted to no one form, for the Holy Ghost has condescended to bless and to act through the most diverse forms. Therefore, let us not rashly pronounce any of them common or unclean.

Ritualistic uniformity, then, is not only not to be identified with Christian unity, but probably not even to be included in the idea of Christian unity. The same must be said of oneness of ecclesiastical government or polity. Yet nothing can be more manifest than that, within certain limits and conditions, Christian unity must work very powerfully towards ecclesiastical oneness—towards the union of Churches. The main reason why not a few Churches stand apart is unhappily to be sought and found not in their principles, but in their passions. Jealousies, rivalries, recriminations, assaults upon one another—most unseemly and improper in themselves, and most injurious to the Christian cause—are exhibited, instead of Christian graces or practices. The strength and energy which should have been applied to the conversion and sanctification of the world are far more than wasted in warring with one an-

other, in "biting and devouring one another." All this is, of course, the very opposite of Christian unity, and must disappear in order that Christian unity may establish and display itself. Wherever there is a real growth of religious life, there a sense of the sinfulness of such a state of things, and the evil which it causes, must spring up, and the desire for brotherly communion and co-operation must be experienced. The spirit of love and peace, of zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of man, working from within, cannot fail gradually to effect many an ecclesiastical alliance and union; and in all such cases there will be a clear gain to Christianity. There may be unions, however, which have no root in Christian unity, which are prompted by worldly motives, and effected from without. These merit no admiration, and are not likely to promote the progress of the Kingdom of Christ. A true union between Churches must be rather grown into than directly striven for. Just as he who would be happy must not aim straight at happiness, but must cultivate piety and virtue, so Churches which seek such a union as God will bless, will only reach their goal by increasing in love to God and to all mankind.

I do not know that we are warranted to affirm with confidence much beyond this as to ecclesiastical union. There are not a few who hold that the Church, as the body of Christ, must become externally, visibly, organically one. This is the sort of unity which the Church of Rome has ever maintained to be an essential characteristic of the true Church. Thus to be one is the ideal which she has so steadily striven to realise; and the ambition of attaining that ideal has been the inspiring cause of most of her crimes. It is a unity, I am persuaded, which would be pernicious if it could be attained, but which fortunately cannot be attained; an ideal which is a dream—a grandiose dream—and also a diseased dream; an ambition which is foolish, if not guilty. The notion of a universal Church in this sense is precisely

the same delusion in religion as the notion of a universal monarchy or a universal republic in politics. Human hands are utterly incompetent to hold and guide aright the reins of universal sway, either in religious or in civil matters. A universal Church would be as surely a misgoverned Church, as a universal empire would be a misgoverned empire.

Before we can even affirm with rational confidence that all Churches will come to have the same kind of government, not to speak of the same government, we must have convinced ourselves that there is one kind of Church Government which is alone of Divine origin and authority. This is not now the prevalent view, perhaps, in Protestant Churches. Most Presbyterians probably, while claiming for Presbytery that it is "founded on the Word of God and agreeable thereto," will not deny that the same may be said of other forms of Church Government, in so far as they contribute to the diffusion and application of the pure and saving truths of the Gospel, and to the gathering and perfecting of the saints. The unity of the Church, the unity of believers, cannot, it seems to me, be bound up with any one kind of government. It is a unity not to be sought for elsewhere than in the love of God the Father, in the faith of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit and in the hearts of believers.

There are many truths in my text still unnoticed, but I will only mention the one which is most prominent—and I will do no more than mention it. The oneness of Christians is not simply described as a blessing to themselves, but as what would be a blessing also to the world. If Christians sincerely and fervently loved one another, and loved the Father and the Son, and showed by their whole conduct how precious, how joyous, how divine a thing Christian love was, the world could not but be influenced by the sight; the love of Christ's disciples towards one another would guide it to the love of Christ Himself: and the love of Christ, to the love of the Father; and so the world would be-

lieve that God really had sent His Son ; would cease to be the world, and would joy and glory in its Redeemer. If those who call themselves Christians were all really so ; if they were one in Christ and strove to be perfectly one ; if, amidst all differences and distinctions, they had a profound affection for one another ; if their very controversies were models of courtesy, and their very disputings examples of meekness and humility ; if brotherly communion, even with those widest apart from them ecclesiastical-ly, were earnestly sought by them, and brotherly co-operation habitual to them, the effect on society would soon be very visible. The sarcasm of the unbeliever would be silenced ; the native loveliness of the Gospel would be made manifest ; and Christians, thus one in heart and life, in affection and action, would

come, with a moral might unknown by the world for ages, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

“Nothing,” said one of the greatest of English philosophers, “doth so much keep men out of the Church, and drive men out of the Church, as breach of unity.” “Keep your smaller differences,” was the exhortation of the Reformer of Geneva ; “let us have no discord on that account ; but let us march in one solid column, under the banners of the Captain of our Salvation, and with undivided counsels, from the legions of the Cross upon the territories of darkness and of death.”

Now, unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end ! Amen.



