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Poetry.

"Happy New Year."

"Happy New Year, papa! mamma!"
They came with the dawning day—
Before the gleam of the morning star
Had paled in the sun's first ray,
The children came, with eager glee—
Saying "Happy New Year" to her and me.

To her and me who were long awake—
Yet seemed to wake but then,
And feigned surprise lest we should take
Some joy from our little men,
Who, clad in raiment white and free,
Said "Happy New Year" to her and me.

I know not if they thought so deep
Into their words as we,
Who scarce with the dead year fell asleep,
And waked—too soon—to see
What sign the New Year's dawn might
bring
Of light and hope upon its wing!

"Happy New Year!"—the sweet duet
Rang through the purpling gloom,
And both their tongues—to treble set—
Made music in the room;
Nor birds outside the casement heard
To such delights our hearts had stirred.

They could not know how dark to us
The night fell 'twixt the years,
Scanning the old time's overplus
Of troubles and of tears—
And fearing that the new might be
Not kindlier to her and me.

Their music of the New Year's dawn
Rang wiser than they knew,
And kindled in our hearts that morn
Content so sweet and true—
The overplus of counted cares
Dwindled to nothing in our prayers.

"Happy New Year!" If God shall grant
Again this welcome sound—
No joy the rolling year shall want—
Though cares may fringe it round;
So sweet a spell have children's lips
To break the gloom of Hope's eclipse!
—W. C. Richards.

Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.
Caution in Criticism.

As the learned and worthy men who prepared the common version of the Bible were not infallible, as might be reasonably expected, there are some instances in which the sense of the original may be more accurately expressed. Whoever, therefore, by judicious criticism, contributes to the elucidation of any obscure or incorrect rendering, performs a useful work. Great caution, however, is manifestly requisite to avoid proposing any change for the worse; as this obviously must be prejudicial to the interests of truth. When, therefore, such changes are proposed, especially in texts of peculiar importance, it is manifestly desirable that the correct translation of them should be vindicated.

Some writers condemn the translation of Jno. v. 39, "Search the Scriptures," and maintain that it should be rendered, "Ye search the Scriptures." It is readily conceded that the Greek words admit of either rendering; but the former appears to me decidedly preferable. Undoubtedly the Jews did generally read the Scriptures, or hear them read; and some devoted much time to fanciful speculations on them: but it does not appear that the rejecters of Christ, to whom He spoke, searched them. *Storkins*, with whom *Parkhurst* agrees, says, (in *Eveanus*) "That it is imperative appears from the emphasis of the word, for it imports the highest diligence and industry, such as can not be attributed to the Jews of that time." (See Rom. viii. 27; 1 Cor. ii. 10; 1 Pet. i. 11.) Our Lord, instead of representing the unbelieving Jews as searching the Scriptures, evidently charged them with ignorance of them, and inattention to them. "Ye do err," says He, "not knowing the Scriptures." Matt. xxii. 29; xii. 3; xxi. 16; Mark. vii. 6-13; John v. 46, 47.

The fact that those who "searched the Scriptures daily . . . believed" (Acts xvii. 11, 12) clearly evinces that

the unbelievers did not search them; and therefore that it was a command. Besides many other versions, it is so rendered in the ancient Syriac, and the Latin Vulgate. In the Douay Version an attempt is made to evade the force of the "command for all to read the Scriptures"; but in the text the imperative is used. So it is also by the Union Revisors, and Dean Alford.

The scope of the passage requires the imperative. Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews, in effect, "You expect to obtain eternal life by the Scriptures, then search them; for they testify of me, through whom alone eternal life can be obtained." Compare Luke xvi. 29, 31; xxiv. 27; Jno. v. 38-40, 46; xiv. 6; xvii. 3.

Another text that may be noticed is Eph. ii. 8, "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Because the word, *pistis*, faith, is feminine, and the pronoun, *touto*, that, is neuter, some imagine that the latter refers, not to faith, but to being saved in general. This objection, however, to the common version has been fully answered by Dr. Doddridge. In his Note on this text he says, "But this is making the apostle guilty of a flat tautology, for which there is no occasion. Taking the clause as we explain it, that is, as asserting the agency of Divine grace in the production of faith, as well as in the method of salvation by it, the thought rises with great spirit. As for the apostle's using the word *touto*, in the neuter gender, to signify faith, the thing he had just before been speaking of, there are so many similar instances to be found in Scripture, that one would wonder how it were possible for any judicious critics to have laid so much stress on this as they do, in rejecting what seems beyond all comparison, the mightiest and most natural interpretation. Compare the original of the following texts: Phil. i. 28; Eph. vi. 18; Gal. iii. 17: iv. 19.

For the satisfaction of such as can not examine these texts in Greek, it may be remarked, that in Phil. i. 28, the word rendered "salvation" is feminine, and the pronoun, which certainly refers to it is, as in Eph. ii. 8, neuter—"salvation, and that of God."

With regard to the changes proposed in the two texts now noticed, Ernesti's rule, "Reject a frigid or inapt sense," appears applicable. By these they are divested of all force, neither enjoining nor teaching anything: but as they stand in the common version—against which in these cases no valid objection can be urged—the former (Jno. v. 39) contains an important command of Christ, enjoining, in effect, upon all who have, or who can have the Scriptures, not merely to read, but to search them; and the latter (Eph. ii. 8) exhibits the exceeding riches of Divine grace, not only in providing salvation for guilty and perishing sinners, but also in disposing and enabling them to "believe to the saving of the soul."

C. TUPPER.

The United Action of the Churches.

FROM A PAPER READ AT A LATE CONFERENCE OF THE BAPTIST UNION AT EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND.

We have seen the necessity of united action; we have been engaged in united action; we have found the benefit of united action. We are not sufficiently mindful of the facts which form the basis of the "united action of the churches"—the facts which make our united action possible. We see very clearly why it is desirable. There is work to be done which can be accomplished in no other way,—the calls to this work are urgent and numerous; the benefits are many and obvious. So far we are well-informed and well-agreed. But these external calls to united action are insufficient to insure it. There needs, in addition, the internal desire for it. We have the call from without. We are still lacking in the motive from within. Our united action will be but feeble, so long as it results only from the excitation of ex-

ternal facts. The way to strengthen it, is to develop the internal impulse. If we get a stronger desire to co-operate, we shall better respond to the calls which bid us co-operate.

When we think of the united action, not of churches, but of individual Christians, we see the force of this at once. We know that for effective action there must be a common faith and love; that the united hands derive their power from united hearts; that the basis of united action is internal union.

As it is with individual Christians, so it must be with churches. The defectiveness of "the united action of the churches" will not be removed until we arrive at a more intelligent understanding, and a deeper consciousness, of the internal unity of the churches. The way to act as one body is to feel that we are one body. I would further observe that the unity I speak of is not something that we have to make. Indeed, it is not a thing that can be made: it grows. In the present instance it has already grown, and is still growing. What it wants is our better recognition. We should almost have what we need, if we did but know that we had it. The unity we want is already a reality, but we are not sufficiently conscious of it. The way to promote "the united action of the churches" is to realise and to foster the internal unity of the churches.

At this point, we come into contact with a feeling which is widespread both around and within our churches, and which is a source of weakness and hindrance. However we may account for it, the feeling does undoubtedly exist in some quarters, that there is no unity in our denomination; that each church is really and practically a denomination in itself; and that even within each church there is virtually a host of denominations. That such an idea concerning us prevails among our Presbyterian brethren needs no proof; and that it exists among our own adherents is well known to some of us, and may be easily discovered by us all. I think it is high time that we acknowledged that within our own ranks there is a considerable mistrust (a mistaken mistrust, I believe, and will try to show) of our congregational order of government, that many of our adherents unwillingly accept this order,—impelled to join us by their conviction about the ordinances of the Lord Jesus, they are yet ill at ease because their faithfulness to His ordinance carries with it, what is to them, an unwelcome disadvantage. It is worse than useless to ignore the deep craving for a broader union on the part of many of our most devout and most intelligent adherents—not union with other denominations, but union within the limits of their own. They could bear the separation which results from their views upon baptism; but they long to feel that there is a real unity among those who are agreed with them, that the Baptist denomination is not only a name, but a reality;—that the Baptist Union is not an incoherent assemblage of churches, but a real fellowship of churches.

I am not defending the feeling I endeavour to describe: I only state its existence. It exists in the South as well as in our own country; and among our English brethren is continually expressing its desire for the introduction of what it calls the "Presbyterian element" into our churches and our denomination. The phrase has been used so often and so loosely, that it has become a sort of cant term, whose exact meaning even those who use it are not prepared to define.

Now, I think there are various ways of meeting this desire; but though many of them are unsatisfactory, the worst of all is to treat it with a sneer. And, on the other hand, I think that the best and the right way is to shew first, that no importation of a foreign element would produce the desired result; and then, that no importation is needed, since we already possess the germ of what is wanted, and that germ only requires cultivation to produce a magnificent growth.

The whole history of the church of Christ has shewn that the unity we want has never been produced by systems of rules, by constitution building, and the like. Unless it proceeds from spiritual causes; unless it is founded in spiritual facts; unless it makes itself felt in Christian consciousness; it is only a name and an illusion. I believe that these needful conditions are present in our churches; and that if we will only recognise them and use them,—then without any amendments of constitution, we shall soon shew both the real unity of our churches and the internal action of our churches.

We need, then, to recognise the real unity of the Baptist denomination. As a matter of fact, we are not simply an aggregation of Christians who happen to be agreed upon a Christian ordinance. We are far more than this. We are agreed upon the truths which underlie our interpretation of this ordinance; and we are further agreed on the practices which naturally follow our common acceptance of this ordinance. Such a statement may be chargeable with vagueness, but it is none the less indicative of facts. It is only so far as we unite in this agreement that we really belong to the Baptist denomination. It is by reason of these things, not simply because we are agreed about baptism, but because we are agreed about the fundamental truths which underlie baptism, and are further agreed about the practices and order which are naturally conformable to baptism, that we are an united body, and not an incoherent and heterogeneous aggregate of churches. I am dealing with facts, and not with preferences or theories. It is easy to object that we have no written constitution with articles and laws, that will justify the statements I have made; that we have no synods or assemblies by which a constitution has been framed; no bishops by whom its working can be supervised; no machinery by which it can be enforced. This is all true, but does not affect the facts to which I appeal. How these facts came into existence is easy to explain, but is not our business now.

Will you bear with me while I speak more definitely on these matters of agreement which give unity to, and therefore fix the limits of, the Baptist denomination? To describe them fully would be impossible in our time, and would lead too far from our purpose; but the briefest sketch may suffice. First—There is a perfect agreement among us on what all acknowledge to be the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. In this matter I believe that there is no body of Christians on earth which has a better claim to be considered as part of the "one Catholic church." Then comes our tacit but most unswerving agreement as to the individual acceptance of these doctrines by our members. Consider, again, how our uniform mode of admission to our churches involves and secures this individual acceptance, and how it is also designed to test the individual experience of the saving power of these foundation-truths.

These things underlie our agreement on the ordinance of baptism; and then they are followed by a complete practical uniformity in matters pertaining to order and fellowship. We may have no written law (at least, we have none outside the new Testament) bidding our churches to be helpful to each other in their pecuniary necessities. But that we practically keep such a law is demonstrated in every building we erect, and in one of the principal branches of the work of the Baptist Union. Consider, again, our unanimous agreement in dealing with the members of other churches. Do they seek occasional communion with us? There is a practice common to all the churches. Do they desire to transfer their membership? Unless there is speciality in the case, we again conform to the universal practice. Are there instances in which discipline has been exercised? No church in our Union would knowingly "sin against the brethren" by ignoring their procedure.

No doubt in some of these things there are varieties of detail in which our practice may differ: no doubt we both take, and just as freely give, a wide liberty in dealing with special and irregular instances; yet, notwithstanding this, we are practically at one, and "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It is in these things that the unity of the denomination consists; it is by these things that we give daily demonstration of the fact that we are "one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

This I believe to be the true basis for the "united action of the churches." That action springs from the real unity of the churches. It is useless to contend that we cannot have unity without laws and constitutions, presbyteries and synods. The answer is that we have it already. If the degree in which we have it is imperfect, yet, perhaps it is quite as great as in those cases where constitutions have been framed in order to secure it.

In few words I will now state my idea as to how the unity of our churches is to develop into the "united action of the churches."

1st. We must see and understand this unity better. We must recognise and realise the fact, that as individuals, we belong not simply to a Baptist church, but to a Baptist denomination.

2nd. Deeper conviction of this fact will lead to a practical loyalty to the denomination. Loyalty to the denomination will not diminish our loyalty to our own particular churches: it will rather conserve it, and, not only so, but will make it more sincere, more effective, and more intelligent.

3rd. We must consider what this loyalty involves. I fear that some of our members are rather slow to understand that all voluntary association whatsoever—political, social, commercial, religious—involves a certain degree of self-surrender and self-denial. When the degree becomes too great for our consciences, we may sever our connection with the society; but, until then, we must merge our individual preference into the will of the society, must conform to its procedure, and uphold its work. Until we get this first principle of association into our minds, we do not understand what a society is; our apparent loyalty to the church, the union, the denomination, is only a happy accident.

4th, and very practically. Let us consider whether the several departments of our Union work—the work which we are now doing—are the things which our denomination most urgently needs. If they are not, let us find something better, and do that. If they are (as I, for one, believe), let us do them, not so well as we should like, but as well as we can.

5th. If we do not desire to abandon any of our present operations, are there not some additional ones we should do well to adopt, or for whose adoption in the future we should begin to prepare? One new scheme is presented to us at our present session. Its desirableness will be so apparent, that the only question will be our power to accomplish it. We shall increase our power just in proportion as we realise and consolidate our unity. There are some things, again, which are not a "question of money." I would like to see a better intercommunication among the churches—a more frequent visitation of each other. There might be annual gatherings of the churches in each district, when we could go down and see how our brethren do, and "ask each other of our welfare."

6th and lastly. Whilst conscious of the things that are lacking, let us gratefully recognise the progress made. It was the boast of Augustus that he found Rome—brick, and left it marble. The ceremony that has taken place to-day, the building in which we are now met, the chapels opened within the last few years, and the chapels that are to be opened within the next few months, suggest the idea that either our retiring or our coming President might make a similar boast concerning