

THE LATEST UNION MOVEMENT.

SOME PRESS OPINIONS.

The recent meeting of representative Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists to consider the question of the organic union of the three denominations in Canada, already dealt with in these columns, has been warmly approved by the press, both religious and secular. The press usually very fairly voices public opinion. There is abundant reason to believe that in this case the press comments on the movement expresses the best thought and feeling, not only of the bodies concerned, but of that section of the general public who give attention to the movements of the church of Christ. No views opposing the movement have come under our notice. The expressions of opinion which follow show how the movement is regarded.

The *Christian Guardian*, Toronto, is the principal Methodist paper in Canada. Its testimony as to the union of the several Methodist bodies, and the union of the several Presbyterian bodies, is clear and strong. It says:

Union in both cases has proved an unspeakable blessing, and has wonderfully promoted the genuine prosperity and usefulness of these churches, making them a power for righteousness in this growing nation that they could never have been had former divisions unhappily continued. In their internal life, in their work in the centres of population, in the breadth and enterprise of their missionary operations in the home and foreign field, in their general influence as factors in the moral and religious life of Canada, they have gained enormously as the direct result of union.

It is quite natural, it adds, that "having solved the problem of union within themselves, and realized immediate, extraordinary and permanent benefit therefrom; they should ask themselves, and ask each other, whether still more extensive unification of Christ's church would not be followed by equal, if not greater, advantages." Of the desirability and feasibility of the larger union, it says:

Theoretically, at least, it also appeals to the reason, as in many ways desirable, and with mutual concessions on minor differences, as essentially practicable. For its successful consummation, however, it must appeal to the general conscience of the churches concerned, as not only desirable and practicable, but as called for in the providence and by the grace of God—in other words, as imperatively necessary and obligatory in order to the higher spiritual development of the uniting churches and the greater glory of God in the spread of Christ's kingdom through their agency.

The *Presbyterian*, Toronto, is the largest and most widely circulated Presbyterian paper in Canada. Like its Methodist contemporary, it testifies in no uncertain terms concerning the blessings that have attended Presbyterian union and Methodist union, saying that, in each case, "the result has been all that the most sanguine promoters of union predicted," and that "the united church has become a vitalizing force in the life of Canada that the divided church never could have been." The meeting in which the union of the Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists was considered and approved, it calls "a notable advance step," in

which "a still higher note was struck." And of the men composing the meeting, it says:

It was not a meeting of youthful enthusiasts, dreaming the rosy dreams of optimistic youth, but of men of age and ripened experience, into whose souls there has come the vision of a larger and fuller church life than has been.

Besides the economic considerations which strongly demand union, it says:

There is the higher motive of our Saviour's prayer and expressed desire for the unity of his disciples. We cannot be wrong in striving for the fulfilment of his prayer. We cannot be moving in the wrong direction when we are seeking to bury old hates and discords, and are moving toward a larger brotherhood and presenting a united front to the forces of evil.

Concerning the religious needs of Canada, with its rapidly growing population, and the responsibility of the church to do its very utmost to meet these needs, its voice rings clear and strong:

No man who takes any adequate view of the situation by which we are faced in Canada can fail to see that the church is entering upon the struggle of her life. We have entered upon a period of national expansion, and unless all signs are misleading the next ten years will witness a rapid growth in population. The question as to which shall be the paramount force in our country's life is a vital one. Shall we maintain our position as a God-fearing and a law-abiding nation, or shall the forces which make for weakening and decay be allowed to gain headway? Under God, the answer to that question depends upon the attitude of the Christian church. If her forces are divided; if there is a waste of men and means; if the ground is not occupied with the wisest generalship, the result can only be loss of ground and loss of prestige. The same thing is true of the ever-widening foreign mission field in which open doors are being multiplied and the fields are whitening to the harvest.

The *Wesleyan*, the Maritime organ of the Methodist church, speaks with favor of the movement towards union, rejoicing at "the breadth of statesmanship and the Christlike spirit" of the representative men who are earnestly and enthusiastically supporting the union project, "not from any thought of denominational prestige, but for the greater glory of God and the economy of resources for evangelical work."

The *Presbyterian Witness*, Halifax, warmly endorses the movement, saying:

Looking at the proposal from the evangelical and evangelistic point of view, there is much to be said for union. The Methodists and Presbyterians preach the same gospel, cherish the same lofty ideals, live the same life of devotion and self-sacrifice, testify against the same forms of sin, and commit themselves to similar efforts in home and foreign fields. Why then work any longer as if we were rivals and aliens?

Of things which have separated the bodies, it says:

But what about our respective histories? And what about our different views of systematic theology? What of Arminianism and Calvinism? These questions and all supposed difficulties are capable of solution and settlement if we are only true to the grand centre of unity—to the Lord Jesus. He is the rock on whom we build. Both united to him cannot be far from one another.

There are many still living, the *Wit-*

ness says, who have had to do with unions (that of the Presbyterian bodies, and that of the Methodist bodies), quite as hard to bring to pass as that now under discussion; and it, evidently, is confident that they and others can, by the blessing of God, bring this about.

The *Dominion Presbyterian*, Ottawa, says the larger union idea "cannot by any means be regarded as the mere dream of dreamers," and that there are no greater difficulties requiring to be solved than were overcome in the unions already accomplished. It adds:

The imperative problem before the Christian people of the Dominion to-day is how to keep pace with, and bring under strong religious influences, the surging crowds of new comers of various nationalities. A union of the brains and enthusiasm and resources to be found in the United Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist bodies would mean a powerful combination for good. . . . The biggest men in these bodies would be least likely to allow so-called vested rights or presumed personal interests to stand in the way of so great a consummation.

The secular press, very generally, has noticed the movement, evidently regarding it as one of large importance. Their comments show the trend of opinion outside denominational circles. We quote from two papers. The *Montreal Star*, regarding it as one of the signs of the times, says:

Nationally and religiously the spirit of the age is against small bodies and in favor of large and powerful combinations. We are Imperialists, even in religion. Canada has seen the union of the Presbyterian churches and of the Methodist churches, and both unions have resulted in splendid success.

The first fruits of such a union would be a telling economy in all branches of church work. The central officers need not be duplicated. The machinery for connexional endeavor would be welded into one, and much costly triplication saved. In small communities, one minister might often do the work now divided among two or three; and the spare men and money expended upon fields now necessarily left vacant. As a fighting machine, a united Methodist-Presbyterian - Congregational church would be much more effective than the three bodies marching separately.

The foreign and home mission fields would gain; and so ought the moral movements in the self-supporting districts. . . . The occasional co-operation of to-day would be replaced by a constant and intimate union of forces to-morrow.

The *Toronto Globe* speaks particularly of the men in the several denominations who are earnestly promoting union, saying:

The striking thing about the proposal of a union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in Canada, as now presented, is that its strongest, most hopeful, and most un- and untempered young men of the churches. The young men will be found, for the most part, as might be expected, favorable to union, for the points of difference are of less importance to them than they were to their fathers. But they are not the leaders in the movement. The most unreserved and impressive appeals are made by the men who have behind them a lifetime of devoted and distinguished service in the churches in which they are honored and trusted leaders. . . . Nor need there be any wonder that age and experience lead in a movement such as this. These men who speak thus to the churches were once fervent denominationalists as the rest. But life has taught them its great

lesson. They have come to see things in their true perspective, and to put first things first. Behind them are their years of service, the total of which might have been larger and richer had the conditions been better. They can estimate more justly than in earlier years the waste and enfeeblement of unnecessary division and unholy strife. That those who follow after may have larger opportunities for effective service the fathers of the churches plead for union among the forces of Christianity.

Besides, too, these men have faced life's real problems, and they see how the lesser problems of theological controversy have been solved and the barriers to union taken out of the way. The emphasis has shifted from questions of philosophy and theology and government, over which the denominations disputed in past generations, to the supreme problems of recovering and redeeming the lives of men and of communities, and the pressing problem of world-wide evangelization. In the presence of these problems all disputes over lesser things shrink into insignificance.

The old men dream dreams. But they are the men whom life has taught and disciplined and made sober. Their dreams are not the impossible fancies of inexperience. They have done things. Their dreams come true.

—The Wesleyan church in the Transvaal reports an increase in membership for the past year of two thousand eight hundred, with six thousand on trial. For several months past a new chapel has been dedicated every week, and the work is growing in every direction, both the colonial and the native churches sharing in the prosperity.

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