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A Present Day Study

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FOREWORD

HRISTIANITY is already one; so it has always been, and so it will always con-It is the Churches that are disunited, and it is of the unification, not of Christianity, but of the Churches, of which this little book treats. How completely this may ultimately be realized the author does not undertake to say; but with all measures and methods which look in that direction, provided they are sound in their underlying principles, and sane in their recognition of existing conditions he is in hearty sympathy. He is confident also that beyond all that has vet been achieved other immense advances toward unification of the Churches are practicable in our day, and deserve whole-souled co-operation.

This subject is commanding an attention that is unusual both as to its extent and as to its intensity. However, most of what is spoken or written in regard to it has reference only to some particular phase of it, or to some proposed project. The author of this little book aims here at a comprehensive though brief presentation of the entire subject both on its theoretical and on its practical side. He craves an unprejudiced and considerate reading.

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PART FIRST The Problem



PRESENT DISUNION; AND WHY

CCORDING to the latest Religious Bulletin published by the Bureau of the Census there was in 1906 a total of 169 or 170 distinct Christian Denominations in the United States. Of these 164 are set down as Protestant; the remainder consisting of the Roman Catholic Church, the several Oriental Churches now having organizations in this country, and the Polish National Church. Ninetenths of the Protestants belong to nine great families of Churches, which, named in the order of the size of their respective aggregate membership, are: - Methodists, 13 or 14 kinds; Baptists, 16 kinds; Lutherans, 24 kinds; Presbyterians, 12 kinds; Disciples, 2 kinds; Episcopalians, 2 kinds; Reformed, 4 kinds; United Brethren, 2 kinds; Congregationalists, I kind but all individual organizations independent. These together aggregate 76 or 77 kinds. The other onetenth of the Protestant membership is divided among the 87 bodies not included in the larger families. During the period between 1800 and

1906, the Census shows a very considerable increase in the number of Christian denominations; the net aggregate after deducting those which disappeared within the period being 34, most of which consist of Protestants.

Why are there so many of these distinct bodies of Christians in the United States, and why especially have we so many kinds of Protestants? There is no country where Christians are not more or less separated from each other by ecclesiastical lines. Ever since apostolic times, and even then, there have been at least the beginnings of such divisions. It is thus apparent that it would be futile to seek an explanation for their presence here wholly in conditions peculiar to our own land. At the same time it cannot be denied that in no other country to-day, and at no time in the past of any nation, has this disunity even approximated to that which obtains here at the opening of the twentieth century of the Christian era. This cannot be entirely what we usually call accidental; there must be in the condition of things peculiarities which at least throw the door open for it. What is the explanation?

One of the conditions that operate powerfully in opening the way for this disunity is the equal-

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ity of all forms of religious belief and practice before the laws of the land. This is not entirely unlimited. Actions which endanger society in any of its vital interests are not permitted under the name of religion, without exposure to the intervention of the civil authorities; but beyond this, every man is not only free to associate himself with any religious body, but he is protected from interference just as much as if all our people belonged to a single Church. This complete equality before the law does not cause disunity, but it leaves the door wide open for it. Besides, in seeking an explanation it needs to be borne in mind that the withdrawal of an old restraint against which men have fretted sometimes is followed by a tendency to run to excess in the use of the new freedom. Equality for all forms of religious belief is comparatively a new thing in the world at large; and except in the outlying possessions of Great Britain, it does not exist elsewhere than in the United States; though in some other countries there is an evident movement toward it.

Another condition that has had much to do with this diversity is the place which religion has held in the life of our people. In the founding of the original thirteen colonies there was

not one in which some phase of Christian belief did not have a very great influence. Let it suffice to point here to the Puritans in Massachusetts, the Baptists in Rhode Island, the Ouakers. the German Protestants, and the Presbyterians in Pennsylvania, the Roman Catholics in Maryland, and the Huguenots in the Carolinas. Down to the beginning of the twentieth century religion has continued to occupy an uppermost place in the thoughts and practices of our people. Of this we have convincing evidence in the provision which by voluntary contribution has constantly been made for public worship; and which has been carried so far that, except in our large cities, it has been difficult to find a town or village where there has not been an excess rather than an insufficiency of church buildings for the accommodation of the inhabitants. More or less the atmosphere of religion has been breathed by our people; only the very lowest in intelligence and morality, and a few folk at the top as to social pretension, being little affected by it. If recently in some localities religion is just now less in evidence, it is a change which awakens surprise among the most of us, and especially among the older of our generation.

A third condition conducing to this disunity is

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the heterogeneity of our population. This was a characteristic at the beginning of our national existence, and prior to it. New England was then the most homogeneous, having been settled mainly by English of the middle class. To New York, beside the English came the Dutch; to New Jersey and Delaware, the Swedes; to Pennsylvania, the English, Scotch Irish, and the Palatinate Germans; to Virginia and to other southern colonies, the English gentry, and also the negro; and to the Carolinas, the French; and each of these brought with them customs and beliefs, religious and other, which long survived, and which have not even yet entirely disappeared. In Pennsylvania, for example, there are regions, rich in agricultural products, where a language which was a dialect of the Fatherland survives, and with it phases of religious belief and practice which were transported to the new world when long ago the settlers fled thither across the ocean in order to find a refuge from oppression. Since the establishment of our independence a stream of emigration, in recent times swollen into a flood has been pouring into our land. For the first decade of the twentieth century, the average of arrivals has not varied much from a million per year; and as to nativity the diversity

has been constantly on the increase. Some bring with them their old national faiths and practices still essentially unchanged; others are drifting away from their ancient moorings; and some have left behind them all the religion they ever even outwardly possessed. We are ninety millions of people, of enormously varied origin either by descent or by present day immigration, and we occupy a vast territory, with physical conditions, and with products so varied that these again co-operate in enabling people of kindred mind to collect in localities in sufficient numbers to perpetuate ancient customs, religious as well as other. This is especially exemplified in the multiplication of distinct Lutheran Churches. By immigration alone between 1890 and 1906 we added II new denominations. To some degree also the birth of entirely new denominations on our own soil can in certain instances easily be traced largely to local conditions. Of this the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the African Churches are well known examples.

Still a fourth condition tending to open the door for the prevailing diversity as to religious denominations in our country is the entire freedom of thought and the liberty of speech which obtain. There is no subject on which under our

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government a man may not think and believe as he pleases; and by virtue of this exemption from interference on the part of others, a very large part of our people have it bred in them to show independence in their ideas and convictions; and this just as much in religion as in any other sphere. It may be that in doing this a good many exhibit more independence than wisdom; yet it is done. Nor need any one hold his tongue, or restrain his pen, provided he keeps within the limits of decency and the requirements of civilized society. There is no vagary of ideas that he may not preach on the housetops; and there is nothing of which Americans are more assured than that, in spite of all the wild religious views and the diversity of religious organizations to which it unbars the door, such liberty of thought and of speech is beyond comparison to be preferred to its restraint or serious abridgment.

Put these four conditions together, and shall any one consider it inexplicable that just now we have so many distinct religious sects in the United States, and that 164 of these are Protestant? However, it is evident that the multiplication of Protestant denominations in the United States is by no means wholly due to these peculiar conditions; for, except as legal hindrances stand in

the way, a tendency in the same direction shows itself in other countries. Two great questions, therefore, present themselves when we advance to a point from which we look out also on the world at large. The first of these is whether there is in the essential nature of Protestantism anything that furnishes opportunity for such ecclesiastical differentiation. Unquestionably the answer must be in the affirmative. On the one hand, it is a fundamental principle of Protestantism that in religion the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only binding rule of faith and practice. Its adherents are at liberty to respect the interpretation put upon the Scriptures by the concensus of Christian thought; or, to respect in a lesser degree the creeds and decisions of ecclesiastical organizations; or, in a still lower measure, the opinions of wise and good individuals. But in the case of any questioning the final arbiter is the Scriptures themselves. These, however, as a rule do not give us the truth in the form of statements which must have the same significance to all men. Indeed, most of the Old and of the New Testament is in the form of concrete expressions made at various times and in various places, in order to meet passing conditions, and are more or less colored

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by these conditions; and for the purposes of other times and places the permanent element needs to be disentangled from the dress in which it was clothed. On the other hand, it is equally a fundamental principle of Protestantism that every man has the right to exercise his own private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Nor does he abandon this right by virtue of becoming a member of an ecclesiastical organization. In the formation of such organizations it is indispensable that some common bond of belief or practice shall be accepted. Even if this common bond is negative in some cases and consists in the ignoring of any creed, the negation has all the functions of a creed. But in the implied subscription which every person in joining a Church necessarily makes, and which at the very least signifies that he finds in the doctrines and polity of that denomination nothing so repugnant to his conscience that he cannot honestly identify himself with it, he yet always as a Protestant holds that he has the right to question any teaching of his denomination; and to carry his case to the Scriptures and there to ascertain for himself what is truth and what is duty.

It is as to these two fundamental principles

that Protestantism differs most radically from Roman Catholicism. Both concede the binding authority of the Scriptures; but the Roman Catholic faith is that within the Church of which the Pope is the visible head on earth exists, and always is operative, the right to bind the consciences of men by an official interpretation of the Scriptures. The Vatican Council went so far as to declare that the Pope when speaking ex cathedra concerning matters of faith is infallible. Of course, for all who accept that dogma it is easy to preserve an outward ecclesiastical unity. On the other hand, it being of the very essence of Protestantism to hold that the Scriptures are the only binding rule of faith and practice, and that every man always has the right of private judgment in such matters, the way is thus opened for diversity of denominations; and they in all countries make their appearance just in proportion as men do not see alike, and as they estimate the importance of their differences concerning religious truth. Hence it was that early in the Reformation in Europe Protestants drew apart into Lutheran and Reformed Churches. Hence also these two great families have been perpetuated on the Continent, and others that are minor in numbers have appeared from time to

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time. In Great Britain questions have rent Protestants into a variety of Churches only a little less multitudinous than in the United States. In fact, one reason why we have so many is because, besides those which are indigenous we have inherited so many from the old world.

Here we are brought face to face with the other and still larger question involved in this general subject. Is there in the nature of Christianity anything that opens the door for ecclesiastical differentiation into separate religious bodies? To this an affirmative answer must also be given, because of the distinction which subsists between Christianity in its essence, and the visible Church. A man cannot be a Free Mason without first joining a lodge; it is joining a lodge that makes him a Free Mason. It is not the joining of a Church that makes a man a Christian. It is easy to conceive a situation, for instance in a heathen land, where because the convert is alone in his new faith and practice, it is impossible for him to unite with a Church; and yet he may be a genuine Christian. Sacramentarians theorize that grace comes ordinarily through such ecclesiastical rites as baptism and the Lord's Supper; but even they seldom fail to have a hope that a great many people who fail

to receive these sacraments as they conceive that these should be administered, yet have received enough of divine grace to unbar for them the gates of heaven at death. As a rule it would be esteemed among Protestants a mark of bigotry not to distinguish between the essentials of a Christian life and admission to any ecclesiastical organization. The conception of the Church generally entertained among Protestants is that it is only an auxiliary of Christianity, altogether unique as such, and one that has been divinely sanctioned and established; yet only an auxiliary. Its function is to take advantage of the social side of our natures, for the purpose of building up those who are already Christians, in their religious life; and of giving efficiency to the work of evangelizing those who are without the fold. What is essential to make a Christian is easily ascertainable in the Scriptures. Repentance for sin, regeneration, faith in Christ as the Saviour, an upright and devout life, and such things are all that are necessary. Roman Catholics and Protestants differ in their opinion as to the way in which these are secured; but what Roman Catholic or Protestant will say that any man who possesses them is not a genuine Christian? The Scriptures are so clear on this subject that denial

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is excluded. When we turn to them for light as to the Church we find the situation very different. They unequivocally recognize the Church as a divine institution. They tell us of the foundation on which it must be built. They inform us also about particular Churches, and lay down regulations for some of their affairs. But beyond all these things, all is left to Christians to decide for themselves. The most that can reasonably be claimed by any denomination is that its members think that it is more in accordance with the New Testament than are other Churches. There may be good and wise Christians who hold to the divine and exclusive right of Episcopacy, or of Presbyterianism, or of Independency, or of the vicegerency of the Pope; but the proofs which they offer do not carry general conviction in favor of any one of these positions. The Bible does not speak with such distinctness and fulness on this subject as to exclude reasonable question; and the only satisfactory explanation of this fact is that we are left to ascertain for ourselves, with such light as is at our command, what to do in this sphere of our religious activity. means an open door for diversity in church polity and in organization.

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In conditions somewhat peculiar in the United States, and in the fundamental principles of Protestantism, and in the very nature of Christianity, influences which open the way for the existing disunion among the Churches, that there is entire justification for such a state of things. Surely it is one thing to show how this disunion comes to exist, and quite another to vindicate it as free from reprehensibility. Before we are prepared to pronounce judgment in regard to it we need to consider all that can legitimately be urged either negatively or positively as to the good that is in it, just as fully and as dispassionately as we consider the evils of it.

It certainly is true that the essence of that unity among his people for which Christ pleaded in his great intercessory prayer remains amid all the diversity of ecclesiastical organizations.

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"We are not divided,
All one body we,
One in hope and doctrine,
One in charity."

Were this not so denominationalism would be synonymous with apostasy. Yet, let no one be blinded by this fact as to the real question at issue. It is not whether a worse thing is not conceivable; it is what ought to be our estimate as to the good or evil of that which exists.

It can be irrefutably claimed, also, that even the extreme of ecclesiastical disunity which obtains, for instance, in the United States is preferable to an outward unity brought about by certain sacrifices. Better as it is among us than to be without the existing equality of all denominations before the law; or that we should be seriously deprived of freedom of thought, or of liberty of speech, or for religion to lose its influence in the life of our people, to such a degree, that out of a latitudinarian indifference they maintain an external ecclesiastical unity. In the mind of some persons there seems to be a vague sentiment that the time has come for good Christians to ignore the lines which since the Reformation have separated between Protestants and

Roman Catholic. No doubt as these parties come to know each other better, and more and more fully to assign respectively to the essentials and to the non-essentials of Christianity their due place, much of the old bitterness will very properly disappear, and more respect will be shown for opposing conscientious convictions. They need not hold each other to be of necessity outside of the true universal Church of Christ in the world. All of this may help to kindle the hope that a day is coming when the separation begun at the Reformation shall be brought to a close. But so long as the price of outward unification is the abandonment of the fundamental principles of Protestantism-the acceptance of the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice, or the right of private judgment in their interpretation, —it is useless to talk or plan for reunion with the Church from which Luther and Calvin and Knox came out in the sixteenth century. If to be outwardly one it is indispensable that the visible Church be elevated from the place of the chief auxiliary of Christianity to that of an essential, then let it remain divided. The Reformation was not a mistake; nor has Protestantism outlived its justification. This does not mean that the hope of final reunion is futile, but it does recognize

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hindrances which so long as they remain, bar the way to it.

It is equally true that disunion is not too great a price to pay for peace. When, for example, the Church of Scotland found itself hopelessly torn by two factions holding diametrically opposite views concerning certain relations to the State, the secession of the Free Church was the only way to end the controversy. All plans for the unification of the Churches which proceed upon the assumption that past divisions have in every case been without warrant, ignore the conditions under which separation has occurred; and in doing this bring an unfair accusation against good and wise men who preferred peace to protracted conflict. This is not saying that the parties may not have misapprehended the importance of the matters over which they have battled; or, that subsequently they or others may not be right in judging that in the lapse of time these matters have lost their importance. It is only asserting that if a Church is torn irreconcilably by warring factions it is better that they should separate into distinct religious bodies, unless, of course, a refuge can be found in those which are already in existence.

But because disunity is preferable to some-

thing else is no reason why it should be esteemed a good. It may be only the lesser of two evils, just as we say that there are worse things than death. Unification of the Churches at any cost is not advocated by any wise and good Christian.

It is often asserted that denominationalism has been a means of producing very considerable positive good; and this also may be frankly conceded. For example, we are told that it has stimulated religious activities. It is by no means a certainty that if all the Protestants of this country were united in a single organization, they would obtain as much money as they do under present denominationalism. When by a representative assembly it is decided to raise funds for some great object such as foreign missions, and an allotment is made respectively for Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists it is not alone the equity of the allotment that operates to bring success: a laudable rivalry stimulates each to furnish its quota. Nor can it be shown that in this there is anything wrong or undesirable.

Another incidental good resulting from denominationalism is that because it presents Christianity in its practical application under so many different phases, it appeals to a greater variety of

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people, and wins adherents that otherwise might be gained. This is perhaps true of the division of the Protestant Churches into two branches. one maintaining a somewhat elaborate ritual, and the other conducting their worship almost or entirely without a ritual. The essentials as recognized by any two denominations may be the same; but it may be that it is something in their faith or usage as to non-essentials concerning which they differ, that attracts some persons who but for this would stand aloof from all Churches and even Christianity itself. The separation of Christians into various ecclesiastical organizations has exerted an important influence for good beyond the sphere of the Churches. Some of the most important preliminary battles for freedom of thought, and liberty of speech, and equality before the law have been fought and won largely over divisions among Christians; and then with these as a start progress has been continued toward a like state of things in the political and in other social spheres; and in the permanent maintenance of this the same influence is ever effective. In the United States where so great a variety of Churches build their houses of worship so as to be seen of every one, and continually proclaim their peculiar ideas of Chris-

tianity, it would be impossible unjustly to muzzle the press or to silence speech on other subjects.

Yet we are not warranted in inferring from the good which incidentally has come of denominationalism, that it is desirable. The ill that is produced may outweigh the good. A careful scrutiny, for instance, reveals in the rivalry between different ecclesiastical organizations much that is greatly to be deprecated, often descending as it does into petty jealousies, and into unbrotherly competition. We have no right to look only at the better side of this influence. The truth is that all such results are only incidental; and our judgment is of little value, unless we go behind whatever is casual to the question radically at issue.

Notwithstanding all that can be said by way of condonation for the disunion of the Churches a very widespread sentiment now prevails among intelligent Christians that it is excessive, harmful on the whole, and that it ought to be cured as rapidly and as completely as practicable. What are the reasons for this attitude? In the very forefront of these is the conviction that many of the denominational organizations rest upon peculiarities of doctrine or of practice, which are not of sufficient importance to justify separation

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because of them. In the list, as reported by our Census Bulletin, there are a good many that have no other reason for their existence than some local dissension, or some matter of religious opinion that cannot be of interest, and much less can be of any considerable importance to others besides the handful of people who have embraced it. Most of these will soon die; but others just as insignificant will arise, if we judge by what has taken place within the last twenty years. It is in this class that nearly all the increase of religious bodies has occurred within the period just named. It may be wholly impossible to convince the adherents of these ephemeral organizations that they are without sufficient warrant, and are therefore to be deprecated; but such is the consensus of opinion among the vast majority of Christians; and this is so evidently correct that argument is unnecessary.

But if we come up into the nine great Protestant families in whose limits are found nine-tenths of all our Protestant Church membership, we face a disunity which is quite as unjustifiable. The Methodists constitute the largest of these families, and this consists of the following branches:—Methodist Episcopal, Union American Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist

Episcopal, African Union Methodist Protestant. African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Methodist Protestant, Weslevan Methodist Connection of America, Methodist Episcopal South, Congregational Methodist, New Congregational Methodist, Colored Methodist Episcopal, Reformed Zion Union, Apostolic, Primitive Methodist Church in the United States of America, Free Methodist Church of North America, Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal Church. Six of these report less than ten thousand members, and four of them less than five thousand. If we turn to the Baptist family, it is still worse as to division. The list consists of the following:-Northern Baptist Convention, Southern Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention, General Six Principle Baptists, Seventh Day Baptists, Free Baptists, Freewill Baptists, General Baptists, Separate Baptists, United Baptists, Baptist Church of Christ, Primitive Baptists, Colored Primitive Baptists in America, Two-seed-in-the-spirit-predestinarian Baptists, Freewill Baptists (Bullockites), United American Freewill Baptists. Of these, six have less than ten thousand members, and six of them less than a thousand. The Presbyterians do not lag behind proportionally in the number of their distinct organizations. Of them

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there are:-The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Cumberland Presbyterian, Colored Cumberland Presbyterian, Welsh Calvinistic Methodist, United Presbyterian of North America, Presbyterian Church in the United States, Associate Synod of North America, Associated Reformed Synod of the South, Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Reformed Presbyterian, Reformed Presbyterian in the United States and Canada. To this class also in reality belong the Reformed Church in America, and the Reformed Church in the United States, and perhaps one or two other denominations. Of this family five or six branches have less than ten thousand members; three have less than a thousand; and one reports only seventeen. The Lutherans are still more divided, and the same fragmentary condition runs through all the larger families of Churches, and down into some of the lesser. No doubt something can be said in extenuation of this state of things. The honesty of the adherents of the various bodies may be conceded. Yet the mere enumeration is enough to silence any attempt at vindication.

This disunion is a positive occasion of harm to the cause of Christianity. The good that may

come from the stimulus of rivalry among denominations is more than overbalanced by the ills that proceed from their multiplication. We have left far behind us the intolerance of which were born such horrors as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's, the burning of Servetus, and the harrying of the Covenanters,-horrors due in part to political partisanship, vet in part also to religious differences. We have more recently left behind us also the debates once conducted in pulpit and platform between Protestant denominations; and if preachers still expound to their congregations the peculiarities of the creed to which they adhere, they do it in such a way as not to disregard Christian charity. This, and more of the same sort relieve the denominations of much of the opprobrium once heaped upon them for their attitude toward each other. We have reached a time when in many of our great undenominational Conventions, we join hands and sincerely and heartily sing together.

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in kindred love:
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above."

We go away from these meetings to assist in work which we can do in common for our Mas-

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ter. This is both beautiful, and prophetic of still closer outward unity. Yet we owe it to the cause of Christ not to close our eyes to the grievous ills which, because of the separation into so many varieties of ecclesiastical organizations, still remain. In the United States there are ministers of the gospel and other Christian workers sufficient in number, if each one had a distinct parish or field of labor not overlapped by any other, and for the religious condition of which he ought to regard himself as responsible, to bring the gospel to the attention of every home and of every individual capable of receiving it. Of course, no parish system could be so enforced as to take away liberty of choice as to place of public worship, or liberty to refuse the care of any or of all Christian pastors and workers. But after making due allowance for exceptional cases a specific parish or field of labor for each minister or other laborer is not only ideally conceivable but capable of an approximation to realization. Denominationalism as we have it renders any such arrangement impossible. The territories of individual churches overlap each other, so that the same field has to be cultivated by a number of laborers when one would be sufficient. Worse still, many of the people are neglected,

simply because of a fear that they belong to a congregation other than that of some minister who gladly would care for them; and that it would be a violation of comity for him to intrude himself upon them. So long as denominational overlapping renders an effective parish system impracticable it seems to remain inevitable that multitudes of our people must be religiously neglected.

Thousands of villages are overstocked with houses of worship belonging each to a different denomination, none of them being ever filled except for a union service. In the cities largely throughly rivalry for what are regarded as eligible locations, a half dozen or more houses of worship built by as many denominations are frequently crowded into the same neighborhood, sometimes with not even a street between two or more of them, while other districts swarming with unchurched people are abandoned by Protestants. This irrational disposition of what ought to be regarded as the chief auxiliary of Christianity means the dissipation of forces which under a more unified organization of the Churches would be sufficient to overtake with the gospel the multitudes of our people who are

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slightly if at all touched by its power to uplift and save them. Frequently the rectification of foolish and unfruitful rivalry of denominations on a common territory becomes so clearly imperative that it has to be attempted; but such an undertaking is apt to involve difficulties that tax the wisdom and patience of the good people who engage in the effort even to the breaking point.

The waste of men and of means in the conduct of the great general operations of the Churches is enormous. Each denomination has more or less of its own colleges, theological seminaries, missionary and other benevolent Boards; and each one must be properly equipped with Faculties, or Secretaries, and other officials, and must be supported with adequate income. It is rare that one of these institutions, or any person connected with the management, can be justly charged with a lack of faithfulness or with inefficiency. Nevertheless it remains true that were it not for denominational divisions much of this machinery could be combined without injury to the work, with an immense saving of expense, and with a release of many laborers desirable in other fields.

Notwithstanding the elimination of sectarian

alienation to such a large degree in our day, and the prevalence and practice of comity and cooperation, the Churches because of their separation into so many different organizations work at comparative disadvantage in the pursuit of many of their aims. They do not always cooperate when they ought. Often when co-operation is eventually effected valuable time is lost in doing this, and subsequently it lacks good common leadership, or heartiness, or other elements of efficiency, because of defective ecclesiastical unity. One need only to watch the way in which the Church of Rome marshals its hosts in order to accomplish its purposes, to learn by contrast the applicability in this sphere of the maxim that in union there is strength. If Protestantism, without sacrificing any of its principles, moved together with a like unbroken visible front it surely often would accomplish far more than it does under present conditions.

It may be that such ought not to be the case, yet it certainly is true that denominational disunion has a powerful tendency to prejudice the cause of Christianity in the estimation of the outside world. It does this in two ways. One of these is by leaving a wrong impression as to the real nature of Christianity. By lifting into

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conspicuousness the minor questions over which denominations divide,-such as methods of church government and modes of administering sacraments, and such insoluble problems as freewill and predestination—it obscures in a measure the more vital matters such as repentance and holy living and redemption through Christ, at least as seen by some who are not very anxious to see aright. It is easy for them to persuade themselves that Christianity concerns mostly with rather small matters. The other way by which the cause of Christianity is thus prejudiced with some people is by raising in their minds the question whether if it is of God it would divide its adherents, and so weaken their efficiency, in the face of the irreligion, the immorality, the superstition, the suffering, and the sorrowing which it professes to have come to remove and heal. Of course they are not justified in it, but men do on such grounds hold themselves aloof from the gospel.

Perhaps in the New Testament there is no passage which speaks specifically on the subject of our modern denominationalism. But there is not a word said by Christ or by his apostles that can be brought forward fairly as countenancing it. The mind of the Spirit as recorded for us

is always in favor of unity among Christians, and no distinctions are made in favor of tolerance of outward disunity.

For the reasons thus briefly stated, and for others, little if at all less forcible the conviction has been formed by a large number of thoughtful and devout Christians of various Churches, and is constantly deepening and widening, that notwithstanding all that may be said in condonation of past disunity, we have reached a period when it has filled up much of the measure of its usefulness, and when so far as this can be prudently done it should as rapidly as possible be brought to an end.

III

REUNION, AND THE WAY TO IT

JE need to distinguish between a unificacation that is ideal, and one which is practicable. It is possible to imagine at least vaguely a single ecumenical visible Church embracing in its membership all professing Christians throughout the world. In fact, this is the theory of the Roman Catholic body. It assumes that there is and can be only one true Church, and that this is found only in its own limits. Few, if any Protestants, regard a unification after that manner as practicable or as necessary for the best interests of Christianity. Ideally it is possible to conceive unification to be carried so far that in each of its included differentiations in the world at large the non-essentials of Christianity should be so kept in a subordinate place as to belief and practice that no divisions would arise because of them; and that at the same time all the essentials should universally be retained. One can conceive of an ecumenical Council assembling in order to confer about the great common interests of Christianity, and by its leadership mightily promoting them, without

assuming autocracy, or violating the liberties of the bodies represented. It is also possible at least ideally to conceive that as an outcome of such a state of things, the ecclesiastical organizations which continue would be enormously enriched by the fellowship in which they are associated: for there is no great denomination incapable of contributing an important element. Just what would be inherited from each we cannot now fully ascertain; but we can see that Roman Catholicism and the Oriental Churches have phases which are of great value; and that every one of the great Protestant families could with advantage transmit desirable features.

There may be good people who promptly dismiss the suggestion of such unification as a mere figment of the imagination, and as unworthy of serious thought. But assuming that it is only an ideal incapable of a near approach to realization, are we justified in an almost contemptuous dismissal? Ideals of perfection are exceedingly healthful stimulants. None of us in this life will be able to reach perfection, yet the thought of it draws us mightily toward it. The fault is ours if the conception of an ideal Church does not profit us.

Let us turn to the unification that is practica-

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ble. Here we are confronted by two limitations setting boundaries over which no passage is yet even dimly in sight. One of these is drawn by the national divisions into which the world is separated for the purposes of government. Missionaries on foreign fields are almost compelled at first to consider the ecclesiastical organizations which they form there, as dependencies of the home Churches; but so soon as these gain sufficient strength in each country the native Christians set up for themselves. Occasionally Churches of adjacent countries, such as the United States and Canada ignore national boundaries; but these are apt to be only temporary arrangements. Nor is it easy to see how this can be changed, or even that it is desirable, if it were practicable. The utmost that the most enthusiastic advocate of unification can reasonably seek is that no matter how the Churches are separated by reason of national limitation, they shall keep out of each other's way on missionary fields, and co-operate so far as possible in the agencies employed; that so far as convenient they shall consult together as to matters of common interest; and that a Christian in passing from one nation to another shall everywhere be welcomed as a brother in Christ.

The other limitation setting bounds to unification consists of irreconcilable differences as to essential beliefs and practices. There is no way now open for bringing together the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations This is not saying that in the future the barriers between them may not be removed. But before this is within the range of possibility, either Roman Catholicism must abandon its fundamental principles, or the Protestant denominations must abandon theirs; or, at least these principles must be treated by one party or the other as not fundamental,—which in reality is tantamount to abandoning them. Upon the assumption that this is true beyond all reasonable question what should be the attitude of these two great bodies of professing Christians toward each other? One of the things most to be desired is for them to seek an intelligent acquaintance with the beliefs and practices concerning which they differ, and also those concerning which they agree, and the reasons. Much of the popular feeling against each other is the result of inherited prejudices and ignorance. On the other hand, to ignorance and mere sentiment is due the disposition among so many people to dismiss the differences between Roman Catholi-

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cism and Protestantism as of no more vital importance than those which separate Methodists and Baptists and Presbyterians into distinct ecclesiastical families. What is needed is, not to dig up the ugly incidents of religious intolerance and superstition in the past, the very spirit of which our age has left behind in all the enlightened nations: but to inform ourselves as to the radical divergences which underlie these great divisions of Christendom. Then alone can we proceed in a manner worthy of people professing to be Christians. Of course, there are many moral and religious objects also for attaining which Protestants and Roman Catholics can now cooperate sometimes unitedly, sometimes each along its own lines. Nor should it be regarded as disgraceful proselytism for either party to seek adherents from whatever quarter available, so long as this is done by open, fair, and intelligent presentation of what is held to be the truth. All this means that any unification of such great divisions of Christendom as the Oriental, the Roman Catholic, and the Protestant Churches is not now in sight above the horizon; and that if such a consummation ever is reached it must be by first looking realities squarely in the face.

The only field yet fairly open for unification is

within the rank of the Protestant denominations of a particular country, such as the United States. Here again the most hopeful realm is within the respective great families; though it is by no means wholly restricted to them, even in our own land and still less so in foreign missionary countries. It is equally true that between actual union and present division in any particular case there may be various stages. The earliest step may be very small, and it may require years to prepare the way for another that is longer; yet no movement of this sort deserves to be despised or neglected. So far as the situation now is hopeful, it is mainly because of preliminary steps that may by and by lead on to more complete unification. But although the field at present is so limited, and although progress is so slow, this is not a sufficient reason for dismissing the problem as too little capable of solution to command attention or effort. Of course, it would be worse than a mistake for any Christian to neglect the work that invites him within the denominations now existing, because he hopes and prays for the coming of a day when the visible Church shall be less divided.

There are some dangers, however, against which warning may not be wholly useless. It is

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possible to attempt unification on a basis that does not justify it. Concerning what either party in a given case holds to be essentials there must first be agreement. Concerning what may be regarded as non-essentials there must be toleration of differences. It has been well said that the rule must be comprehension, not compromise. Only as denominations come to see their agreement in essentials, and to comprehend in their toleration differences about non-essentials, is it either practicable or desirable to weld them into union. In our enthusiasm for so great a cause it is easy to lose sight of this vital principle, and to waste strength; and to prejudice the main object, which should be to bring together only congruous elements. This seems to be the mistake now making by the well-meant efforts of that body of Christians which insists upon the "historic episcopate."

Another danger to be avoided is excessive haste. It might be that if a popular vote of the members of the dozen Presbyterian bodies in this country could be taken on the desirability of union as an abstract question, the majority would be overwhelmingly in the affirmative. But were that majority now to proceed to carry into effect this vote, there might be so much dissent on the part of large minorities in a number of these

bodies, so much bitterness, so many lawsuits, so many fragmentary remains left outside the new organization, that it would be a reasonable question whether it would not have been better to wait for more favorable conditions. When the Old and the New School Presbyterians united the advance toward this consummation was an example of most commendable patience and wisdom in dealing with obstacles. It was reached so slowly, and such care was taken to satisfy all objections, that no fragments were left behind when the union was finally effected; and no serious dissensions on account of it have since disturbed the united Church. One of the most hopeful conditions affecting the present negotiations between the Reformed Church in the United States and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America is the unavoidable necessity of waiting several years before a union can be consummated. Like delay possibly might have made the absorption of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church more complete. Nevertheless there is another side to this phase of the subject. It by no means follows that because a union between two denominations cannot be effected with entire completeness, it should be abandoned. It is to be regretted that the com-

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ing together of the Free and the United Presbyterian Church in Scotland left on the outside the little fragment held to be legally the Free Church, and that it was followed by the controversy over property. But there are few thoughtful people who upon careful consideration of the whole matter would not heartily approve the coming together of the two bodies. In all cases, there is a possibility of erring on the side of haste, or of erring on the opposite side of inertia; and a certain amount of risk must be taken.

To some persons longing for unification approximating to the ideal and eager for a rapid advance toward it, what has been said as to the limits within which it is now practicable, and as to the pitfalls to be avoided, may seem in promise to fall so utterly short of meeting the demands of the situation that they must withhold their approval and co-operation. But what are such persons expecting to do? They may stand at one side and criticize such movements as are making, because they are so slow and so small: but the only influence of such an attitude is to retard the very work with which they are in sympathy, for the reason that it discourages friends who in their way are lending a hand. Or, they may in the heat of their zeal rush out

of the existing ranks and undertake to march by themselves, and with greater rapidity; but the only result of that course is to add an additional division to those already existing in Christendom. The no-creed parties under present conditions tend to make just so many more denominations among Protestants. The right thing for all who long for the ideal unification, or an approximation to it, is to encourage and help so far as practicable—not every scheme holding up this as its aim but every movement making in that direction, and having real promise of efficiency and of benefit to Christianity.

PART SECOND Progress



IV

IN CHRISTIAN COUNTRIES

HAT progress has been made in recent times toward the solution of this problem? Broadly speaking, the world over, the great outstanding landmarks of the advance consist of Comity, Co-operation, Alliance, Federation, and Union. But these have taken upon themselves such distinctive characteristics respectively in Christian lands, and on foreign mission fields that it is most satisfactory to consider the subject successively from these two points of view.

Comity is simply courtesy; and between denominations, as between individuals, it may be practiced independently of any organization or regulations. When, for example, a Presbyterian house of worship is destroyed by fire, and the Methodists say, Come over and use our building at certain hours, that is Church comity. It takes innumerable forms according to circumstances, and is constantly on the increase. Much of it is far more than mere neighborliness; it is an expression of the conviction of the brotherhood of

all Christians, notwithstanding their separation by denominational lines. But Church comity is no longer left to be practiced wholly without organization or regulations. One of the best illustrations of it is to be found in the Interdenominational Commissions which, under a variety of names, and without uniformity of methods are operating in approximately half of the States of our country. The first of these to be instituted is that of Maine. It dates back now some twenty years. Its object is tersely declared to be to "allay friction between denominations, and to prevent the waste of resources in unfruitful rivalry." It aims to do its work through the denominations, and without any considerable machinery of its own. Its chief service thus far has consisted in bringing together in neighborhoods or towns into a single church a number of organizations that have been started by different denominations, but have been too weak to be effective: or to anticipate and prevent such a mistake; and to do this by arrangements that are equitable and satisfactory to all parties. In some of the cities of our country, and in other districts smaller than a State, associations of the same general type have been formed, and have done good, the amount of which of necessity varies

according to circumstances. In all cases, however, they claim for themselves no other function than to help and guide in the practice of the courtesy which is born of the spirit of Christianity, and for which there is so wide and needy a field.

Co-operation means working together to accomplish some purpose. Of course, in all Church comity, and in federation, and in union there is co-operation as an essential element. But in the relations now subsisting between the denominations this term, at least to a considerable extent has come to be applied to combination of effort for the support and promotion of some specific Christian object. Here, again, there is much that is undertaken and accomplished independently of organization or regulation. Churches co-operate when each in its own sphere has a part in any common cause. Often merely by some cotemporaneous expression of sentiment, even without so much as a common public meeting, a community thus is safeguarded against encroachments of evil with which it is threatened; and in the same way some positively worthy cause is promoted. More and more this is coming to be recognized and practiced among Christians of every name.

But we are concerned here especially with or-

ganized interdenominational co-operation. Only some of the larger examples can be mentioned. Two of these deserve to be named first, because of their early origin and their continued efficiency:-the Religious Tract Society of London, which antedates the close of the eighteenth century, and has always had the support of the evangelical Christians of Great Britain, regardless of denomination, and the British and Foreign Bible Society, which followed in 1804. To the same class belong such organizations in our own country as The American Bible Society, The American Tract Society. The American Sunday School Union, The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Religious Education Society, The Young Men's Christian Associations, The Young Women's Christian Associations, The Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor, The Brotherhood of Andrew and Philip, The Order of King's Daughters and Sons, The Student Volunteer Association, The Layman's Missionary Association, and others. Most of these directly or indirectly comprehend the entire world as their field of labor, and seek under an undenominational flag to do their work. Their existence and prosperity show that the lines which divide denominations are regarded as not

running deep enough to touch the vitals of Christianity.

The nature of what are called Alliances can best be understood by looking at the two leading examples. Of these the older is the Evangelical, which was formed in 1845. As to its territory it aims to be as wide as the world; and it has its branches in both Christian and non-Christian lands. As the name indicates, it is an organization which welcomes into its membership all Christians who can be fairly regarded as "evangelical" in their faith and practice. The constitution sets forth its object as "the furtherance of religious opinion" in order "to manifest and strengthen Christian unity, and to promote religious liberty, and co-operation in Christian work, without interfering with the internal affairs of the different denominations." This Alliance has rendered valuable service of various kinds. Among others it has brought to bear the weight of Christian opinion against religious oppression in certain nominally Christian countries. Every year also it calls the Christian world to a week of prayer, and names for it topics which appeal to Christians everywhere. In the United States it has been crowded somewhat aside by other kindred Associations; yet

it has continued to be useful, as for instance, by arousing public sentiment against the diversion of public money to the support of sectarian purposes.

The other leading example of this kind of organization is "The Alliance of the Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System." Like the Evangelical Alliance it reaches out its arms to the ends of the earth; but it draws for membership only upon one great family of Protestants. It has not been instituted for defence against any of the other divisions of the Church of Christ; or for aggressive warfare upon them; its sole aim is to increase the efficiency of that part of the army which marches under the banner of Presbyterianism. This organization represents nine denominations in the United States, with a constituency in round numbers of 6,500,000; the Presbyterian Church in Canada, with a constituency of 600,000; and more than eighty denominations on the five continents other than North America, with a constituency of at least 25,-000,000. Other denominations, such as the Methodists, the Congregationalists and the Baptists are adopting similar agencies, in order to increase their efficiency by bringing together for

consultation the members of the same family of Churches, irrespective of national lines.

As distinguished from the Alliances, what is known as Federation, on the one hand, at least usually limits itself to some one country or region; but, on the other, it includes Churches that are of various families. Perhaps it can be safely said in a vague way that the name is meant to designate a joining of forces which is a little closer than what is usually spoken of as Comity or as Co-operation; and yet as not in any degree involving organic union of denominations.

Of these Federations there are in the Christian lands so many, and they are in such different stages of development, and in each case so much modified by conditions, that any attempt to enumerate them is likely to be unsatisfactory. Geographically considered some of them are limited to a part of a country, such as a city, or a State; as for example New York, or London, or Indiana. Others are between denominations of the same family within the bounds of a nation. It is reported, for instance, that a Federation has just been effected in the United States between the Evangelical Association and the United Evangelical Church. It is anticipated that probably the immediate outcome of the con-

ferences that are going forward between the Methodist Episcopal Church (North), and the Methodist Episcopal Church (South), and the Protestant Methodist Church will be a federation of these bodies. In England this kind of an association is receiving consideration among the Nonconformists. In still other cases the Federation embraces the most of the Protestants of an entire country, as in France where the three leading bodies are for certain purposes thus associated.

By far the greatest of these organizations is The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. Its plan provided at the outset that thirty-three different denominations mentioned by name should be admitted to representation, and most of these have through appropriate agencies accepted, and several others have since been added; so that a large majority of Protestants in the United States are included. In the plan it is explicitly stated that the Council has no authority to draw up a common creed, or in any way to limit the full autonomy of the bodies adhering to it; and that its sole function is the expression of its counsel and the recommendation of a course of action in matters of common interest to the Churches, local Councils,

and individual Christians. Its object is declared to be, to express the fellowship and catholic unity of the Christian Church; to bring the Christian bodies of America into united service for Christ and the world; to encourage devotional fellowship and mutual counsel concerning the spiritual life and religious activities of the Churches: to secure a larger combined influence for the Churches of Christ in all matters affecting the moral and social condition of the people, so as to promote the application of the law of Christ in every relation of human life; and to assist in the organization of local branches of the Federal Council to promote its aims in their communities. The meetings of this body are held only at intervals of several years, and of necessity are occupied chiefly with the discussion of topics, and the expression of the common conviction in resolutions. In 1908 some of the subjects considered were Co-operation in Foreign and in Home Missions, the Church and Modern Industry, Divorce, Sunday Observance, Temperance, International Relations, Family Life, the Press, the Immigration Question, Religious Instruction in Higher Institutions of Learning, and State Federations. In the interval between the meetings an Executive Committee seeks to

promote the objects which have received the approval of the general organization. Although the Council can do no more than consider matters within the limits which it has prescribed for itself, and express its convictions in regard to them, it is able to make its influence felt effectually in matters that concern its constituency. This has recently been illustrated by the considerable part its Committee has had in helping the Home Mission Boards of a number of the denominations to agree upon a plan by which they shall avoid overlapping in certain large districts of our country.

Comity, Co-operation, Alliance, Federation,—they are all steps toward a unification of the Churches in Christian lands, and as such as well as for their own sake, are of great value. It may be, as is so often said, that for the present, beyond these the denominations, except in a few cases, are not prepared to go. Nevertheless, in recent times so much progress has been made in actual organic Union that this calls for hearty thanksgiving, and encourages its advocates to take courage, and endeavor to push forward that cause as rapidly as may be expedient. Between 1890 and 1906, according to the Bulletin issued by the national government, only seven or eight small

Protestant denominations have disappeared in the United States. Only five were consolidated with other bodies, and these were of a minor grade. If we were to look as these meagre figures, and if along with these we were to include in our view the new sects that have arisen and have swollen the net total beyond that of 1800, we might, did we not take into consideration other facts, be tempted to infer that no progress is making toward union. That, however, would be a serious mistake. Negatively it is significant that no division has occurred in any large denomination during the period covered by the Bulletin. In fact, since the civil war, fifty years ago, there has been none. This has not been because no burning questions have arisen, with strong convictions on the part of earnest men and women on opposite sides; but because the strain that once would have rent a denomination in twain has had no such result. It is not too late to stretch to the breaking point the tie that binds in outward ecclesiastical unity; but it requires more to do this now than it did less than a century ago.

Within the last fifty years there have been several unions of Protestant religious bodies, especially in the English-speaking world, and

these in their aggregate of membership have been so large as not merely to counterbalance all the members that constitute the entirely new organizations that have appeared, but also to leave them in an insignificant minority. Some of the most notable have been within the Presbyterian family, and are as follows, in the order of time: -1858, The United Presbyterian Church of North America, out of the Associate and the Associate Reformed Churches; 1869, The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, out of the "Old" and the "New" School Presbyterian Churches; 1875, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, out of several distinct Presbyterian bodies; 1876, the Presbyterian Church of England, out of the body previously bearing that name, and the United Presbyterian Churches of England; 1900, the United Free Church of Scotland, out of the Free, and the United Presbyterian Churches of that country; 1901, the Australian Presbyterian Church, out of six bodies which previously had existed, one each in the respective colonies of that continent and Tasmania; 1901, the New Zealand Presbyterian Church, out of the two Presbyterian bodies previously formed respectively in the North and in the South Island; and, 1907, the Cumberland

Presbyterian Church with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. It is very significant that the General Assembly of the body last named has for several years perpetuated a special Committee, whose main function seems to be to meet at least half way all advances made by kindred Churches toward such closer relations as their title indicates. Of the diligence with which this Committee is cultivating its field, and of the readiness of the Church to which it belongs to move forward toward the unification of the denominations, the General Assembly of 1911 gave abundant evidence. Measures of a general character were reported and adopted looking to the bringing Christians of every name together in closer fellowship and in unity of purpose, and to securing more complete co-operation in social service and evangelization. Specific action also was taken in favor of participation in the World Conference on Faith and Order proposed by the Protestant Episcopal Convention. A hand was stretched out to the Disciples of Christ, and their freshly appointed Commission on Christian Union. The United Presbyterians were again met more than half way and assured of a readiness for closer relations, even to the extent of organic union.

Most remarkable of all these measures was the adoption of a plan by which the way may be judiciously prepared for uniting the (German) Reformed Church with the Presbyterian. Such an expression of the attitude of the great Church for which the General Assembly speaks is enormously significant of the direction in which the current is running, and of its force.

In no other of the Protestant families has so much progress toward union of the branches been made as among the Presbyterians. Still something has been achieved in recent times. For instance, more than fifty years ago all the Wesleyan Methodists of New Zealand and Australia had already joined in a single Conference; in 1873 the Methodists of Tasmania and the South Sea Islands were united with these; and by 1902 other English Methodists were included; so that there has since this latter date been a great Australasian Methodist Church; though solely for convenience the New Zealand membership are about to separate. In 1874, the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Canada united with the New Connection; and in 1883, the Methodist Episcopal, the Primitive Methodist, and the Bible Christian Church also came in: and there is now a single Methodist organization

for all of that Dominion. Among denominations whose polity is congregational, each local organization being theoretically independent, there is not much opportunity for organic oneness. On the practical side, however, union is effected by meeting together in Associations for conference, and by the support of common agencies. In 1908, for instance, a basis of this kind was agreed upon by a joint committee representing the Northern Baptists of the United States and the Free Baptists; and this has since been so widely approved that it is held to be practically in operation at home and on mission fields. Is it too much to hope that the conventions in which the Baptists of North America meet, and that the World's Baptist Convention will bring about other such results?

Efforts looking to union have been initiated but not yet accomplished, among a number of Protestant bodies. Down in Australia negotiations have for several years been progressing between the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, and what is there known as the Church of England (Episcopalian); and some time ago a basis was reported which seemed to be satisfactory to a large portion of the ministers and people. For the present, the

movement is partly halted. In New Zealand negotiations are progressing between the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodists. In South Africa similar negotiations have for several years been conducted between the Wesleyans, the Baptists, the Presbyterians, and the Congregationalists; but as yet only progress is reported. In the United States about the same thing is to be said of the effort to bring together Congregationalists, United Brethren, and Protestant Methodists. Among many people there is a hope that the outcome of the conferences now going forward between representatives of the Methodists North and Methodists South and Protestant Methodists may result not merely in federation but in ulti-In Scotland Committees of the mate union United Free Church and the Established Church have been conferring as to union, but as yet they seem to have made little headway. Last year a couple of dozen members of the Protestant Episcopal Church met in New York and formed what they call "The Christian Unity Foundation," whose ultimate purpose is declared to be "the union of the Christians of all the world, Protestant, Eastern, Roman Catholic, everybody, everywhere." Whether this new-born infant will survive, and if so what it will undertake.

In Christian Countries

and how it will pursue its object remain to be seen. The Protestant Episcopal General Convention at its last meeting adopted a resolution looking to the calling of a Convention, somewhat after the model of the World's Missionary Conference, to consult as to Christian unity; which usually in the minds of the leaders in that body means among other elements Church unity. The matter was given into the hands of a committee of seven bishops and seven laymen, to be carried into execution as seems best to them. Since then a conference has been informally held by this Committee with representatives of other Protestant organizations, and with such encouragement that consultations on a larger scale are planned to follow. This is by far the most ambitious scheme now launched to promote the union of the Churches; and as such it is certain to meet with many serious hindrances. But it will render valuable service even if it accomplishes no more than to indicate the obstacles that for the present seem to block the way, and to give some influential expression to the sentiment everywhere increasing against the prevalent divisions except as necessitated by radical differences of faith and practice. Perhaps the most hopeful of all these unaccomplished move-

ments is in Canada, where for seven or eight years negotiations have been going forward between the Presbyterian, the Methodist and the Congregational bodies. The committees in charge have agreed upon a basis of union which includes doctrine and polity; and steps have been taken to submit this for approval by the several organizations concerned, and with a fair prospect of an affirmative response.

V

ON MISSION FIELDS

THE progress on mission fields consists in part of mere advances toward unification. Of these one which has especially arrested attention is the Conferences which have been held. For almost two decades representatives of the Foreign Mission Boards of America have at stated times met for the purpose of consultation about the work with which they are entrusted. Through this common agency, among other matters of importance, agreement is reached concerning such questions as the occupation of territory so as not to waste men and means by overlapping on the same fields, and as the joining of forces in schools, hospitals, and the press. In this way, from home there goes out an influence which, though it falls short of eliminating denominationalism from missionary territory, yet helps toward keeping it in such subordination as not to be a hindrance to the work of evangelization, and toward avoiding friction and waste. This conference also because of its comprehensive membership is able to do much to assist and

to utilize such undenominational organizations as the Student Volunteer Movement, the Foreign Missionary Department of the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young People's Missionary Movement, and the Laymen's Missionary Movement.

On most of the mission fields besides the conferences that are local and composed of fewer members, others that are national or international in their territory and large in numbers assemble from time to time. Among the most conspicuous of these are the Conferences respectively of China, Japan, India, the Turkish Empire, South Africa, and South Central Africa. There is a separate Conference for South India; and there is also one for Manchuria. In all of these nearly every evangelical Mission for the territory embraced is represented. There are others organized on a less general basis. For example two Conferences of missionaries among the Moslems have met,—one at Cairo, and another at Lucknow. There is a Conference of Lutherans working in India; and one respectively of Scandinavians, and of Germans in China. Recently a great gathering of Indo-Christians assembled at Madras. In such meetings there is a comparison of methods and meas-

ures; and frequently in them originate undertakings of the very first importance to the work of missions. For instance, in the first Conference at Shanghai steps were taken which have eventuated in the accomplishment of the gigantic undertaking of a thorough revision of the Bible in Chinese. Almost an exactly similar work of Bible revision was brought about in Japan by the first Conference in that country. Through these bodies on several territories differences between the respective missions are settled by the agency of Arbitration committees. One of the most remarkable of these undenominational organizations, embracing unevangelized as well as Christian lands, is the World's Christian Student Convention, a meeting of which was recently held at Constantinople with an attendance mounting up into the hundreds and coming from many parts of the earth. A similar Convention for South America met this year near Montevideo.

By far the greatest of such assemblies is the World Missionary Conference which was held at Edinburgh in 1910. At present, according to the highest estimate, there are scattered over the various unevangelized regions of the earth about twenty thousand foreign missionaries, men and women; coming in the proportion approximately

of about 4.5 from Great Britain and Ireland. 3.75 from America, and 1.75 from continental Europe and elsewhere. There are also in round numbers about five thousand ordained natives and one hundred thousand native helpers. From most of these, representatives attended the Edinburgh Conference, and with them were joined a great multitude of ministers and laymen from Christian lands. It has frequently been said that this was the most remarkable meeting ever held; and probably the claim cannot be gainsaid. As to results, among others, it has done far more than to show that beneath all the divisions of Protestantism there is a unity as to essentials; it has put a new stimulus in the movements that tend wisely to bring them closer together in externals and non-essentials, and has provided agencies by which to give them practical efficiency.

On the mission fields Comity usually obtains in a large degree. Proselytism of converts is generally discouraged by the respective representatives of the denominations; and it is regarded as carrying with it more or less of opprobrium when it does occur. Overlapping of labor in the same territory is, as a rule, avoided. Stations established by different Boards even in the

same city usually are so conducted as to avoid that mistake. Little is said in speech or in print concerning matters of doctrine or polity over which denominations in Christian lands are divided; the great essentials of Christianity are kept so prominent as to leave small place for the non-essentials. Usually the measure and the manner of this comity are left to the individual missionaries and churches; but not infrequently it is stimulated and guided by local or general Associations. One of the most striking examples of it as practiced on a comprehensive and formally declared plan is found in the Philippines. Soon after mission work was begun there by Protestants, an Evangelical Union was organized, for the purpose of securing effectiveness in the common work of evangelization; and this has ever since been in operation, and it includes in its membership substantially all the Missions. The constitution binds its adherents to recognize and respect the discipline, polity, and doctrine of the various denominations represented; to receive members from the respective churches only on certificate; not to employ each other's workers without mutual agreement; to strive to avoid duplication of such agencies as medical, educational, and publishing, on the same fields;

and in case of question as to the occupation of any particular territory, to submit the matter to the decision of the Executive Committee, whose decision if approved by the home Boards, shall control.

On mission fields Co-operation is practiced in so many ways, so widely and so variously according to local conditions, that no exhaustive enumeration of cases can here be attempted. Most frequently it has to do with such agencies as schools, hospitals and publication. In China, for example, the English Baptists join with the Presbyterians in the support of the Shantung Christian University with its three colleges respectively of Arts, Medicine, and Theology; and some others are disposed to swell the ranks. The Pekin scheme involves a still broader combination, including American Congregationalists, representatives of the London Missionary Society, Presbyterians, and Methodists. The Yale Mission has looked toward the building up of a Christian Institution of higher learning for all denominations, and other organizations have similar aims in view. At Nanking the Methodists, Disciples, and the Presbyterians North and South maintain a Bible Training School. Out in Western China the Missions have planned not

only for co-operation in schools, medicine and publication, but also to have a common hymn book and one magazine. In Ceylon and India joining of hands in such agencies is already effected. Japan has had for some time "The Standing Committee of the Co-operating Christian Missions," to oversee work in which all join. As to all this, Korea occupies a position of great forwardness. A veteran missionary writes:—"We have union in tract work, union in translating the Scriptures, a union hymn book, union Sunday School lessons, a union English paper, union schools, a union college and normal schools, a union school for girls and women."

Of Alliances and Federations formally so designated and of associations so near akin to them that they may be classified in the same list there are many on the mission fields, and the tendency is toward a rapid increase. The Evangelical Alliance has branches in China, India, Persia, Syria, Turkey, South Africa, and perhaps in other non-Christian lands. In Japan one or more of the existing associations is about to be transformed into a Federation. In China there is a Federal Council, with subordinate Councils in some of the provinces. In India a Presbyterian Alliance has been in existence for years,

and has been especially serviceable in bringing together for consultation the representatives of a dozen denominations operating on that field, and in promoting the Unions which are now effected. A Federation also seems to be assured. There is in that country a National Missionary Society, the members of which consist of natives, and the object of which is to draw out the activities of the membership of the Churches of various sorts, in the work of evangelization. As a rule the missionaries favor these organizations as in themselves wholesome and stimulating. Some are content to see in them enough to satisfy the need on these fields for a closer joining of forces, without incurring the difficulties and dangers of union. Others look beyond this and hail these associations as forerunners of the elimination of denominational divisions, and the speedy coming together of the whole body of Christians in each of these lands as national Churches.

On mission fields Comity and Co-operation prevail perhaps more widely and thoroughly than is generally known in Christian lands. More and more out there friction and waste through denominationalism are disappearing, and they promise soon to be reduced to a minimum. To promote this result special means were instituted

by the Edinburgh Conference. But on the other hand among some ardent friends of missions at home a rather exaggerated conception is current as to the extent to which union has there been effected. As yet union has been almost entirely within the limits of ecclesiastical families. such as the Presbyterian; and even where this has occurred it has not always been possible to bring together all the branches. To some extent this state of things is due to restraint from the home land of the missionaries. Denominations are apt to be a little reluctant and slow in allowing their representatives on foreign fields to transfer their names and the fruits of their labors to the new ecclesiastical bodies, though success in evangelization must eventually bring these in its train. As to this some of the home Churches have been wiser than others. For instance, years ago the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America adopted a plan by which its ordained missionaries could be encouraged to join the new independent Churches and yet to do this without being treated as if they had thereby severed themselves from all official recognition by the home Church. Their names are published annually in a separate list in the Minutes of the General Assembly, and they can

at will on their return permanently from mission work on foreign fields resume their places in their Presbyteries.

The progress which is making toward independent Churches out there is due to two leading influences. One is that of the missionaries. They see the folly of perpetuating ecclesiastical divisions which have had their origin in conditions peculiar to other times and other countries. To a very large degree they seek to ignore in their ministry the questions which lie back of these divisions and to keep in full view only the essentials as to which there is agreement. Why separate the native Christians by ecclesiastical lines which in almost everything besides outward organization is put aside as valueless or worse? Not every missionary assumes this attitude, but the exceptions tend all the while to decrease in number. The other influence co-operating with this comes from the native Christians. Few of them understand the reasons which have led to the various denominational differentiations in Christian lands, and fewer still take any interest in the questions involved. In order to understand their attitude it is also to be borne in mind that Christianity in each country has its own peculiar atmosphere and environment, and

consequently needs its own distinctive adjustments. The gospel at the same time awakens the converts to a consciousness of their own corresponding responsibilities and duties; and it therefore cannot be otherwise than that the native Christians should sooner or later desire to manage their ecclesiastical affairs according to ideas more or less different from those of America or of Europe. Of course they may inaugurate movements toward this goal, before they are competent wisely to direct. Serious risks to the common cause of Christianity are sure to be encountered. Still the reasons for organizing these new Churches are so solid and sound, and at any rate the movement is making such headway that to oppose is to place one's self in the way of the inevitable

The new Churches which have been formed on foreign mission fields all limit themselves by national lines. They do this because of political institutions, language, race, and like peculiarities. They do not intend thus to isolate themselves from the other evangelical Churches of the world at large, but only to adjust themselves to the conditions under which they exist. To this, according to Protestantism there is no objection; in fact, it cannot be avoided. If, one

day under some form of federation, or of still closer union, the lines of nationalism now separating the branches of the visible Church shall become far less in evidence, there is every reason to anticipate that these new organizations will heartily approve and co-operate.

On the mission fields, just as at home, the Presbyterians are foremost in the formation of new Churches out of bodies previously independent of each other but holding to that general polity and belief. The following are the most notable instances:-The Church of Christ in Japan, constituted out of five different Missions; in Korea, one native Presbyterian Church, including all Presbyterians; the Presbyterian Church in China which embraces the Missions of eight different bodies, of Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, and the United States, and which extends a standing invitation to all other Churches in China, holding to the consensus of the Reformed faith, to unite with it; the Presbyterian Church of India, composed of six bodies—Presbyterian, Reformed, and Calvinistic Methodist; the Presbyterian Church of South Africa, formed from several organizations previously operating independently on that field; the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, uniting the Missions of the "North-

ern" and the "Southern" Presbyterian Churches; the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Mexico which is an independent body, and includes all Presbyterians; and the United Synod of the New Hebrides, with a similar content.

Presbyterians, however, are merely in the lead in this matter. In Japan there is a Methodist Church which embraces all the adherents of that system. In Japan the adherents of the Church of England are also practically united in one body. Negotiations looking to similar organization of independent native Churches out of the Missions of the same family but of different branches are more or less advanced in other lands. Of course, in the case of the Congregational and the Baptist missions, because of their polity no formal union into a single ecclesiastical body is practicable; but short of this it is possible for them to join in Associations and in other ways, and they are falling in with the prevailing tendency.

There is a still further step that is possible. This consists in disregarding family ecclesiastical lines; and in South India that step has been taken. On account of linguistic, geographic, and other reasons, the Presbyterians and the Reformed of that region have withdrawn from the

Presbyterian Church of India. already mentioned, and have joined with the Congregationalists in the formation of a new ecclesiastical body for South India, on the basis of a statement of doctrine and polity comprehensive and flexible enough to include them all. In other mission lands movements have been started which distinctly look in the same direction. For example, in British East Africa, not long ago, forty-five missionaries held a conference for the consideration of union in a single body. A definite plan was not adopted; but it is highly significant, that for the accomplishment of this purpose, Ouakers expressed a willingness to use the sacraments, Presbyterians to serve under a bishop, and all to use both a liturgy and free prayer. Among the native Christians in various countries the tendency to come together, irrespective of the denominationalism which hitherto has obtained among them, in one independent Church is constantly becoming stronger, and by many intelligent missionaries this consummation is regarded as inevitable and not far distant in time.

VI

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NE of the principal obstacles at present in the way of any very comprehensive unification of the Churches is the disposition of some of the respective families to insist upon the essential nature of the beliefs and practices by which they are distinguished. So long, for instance, as the "historic episcopate" is declared by a large and influential section of Protestant Christians to be an ecclesiastical sinequa-non, there must continue to be at least two great Protestant denominations. It is equally true that so long as another large and influential section hold that there is only one method of valid baptism, another differentiation must be perpetuated. In like manner within the respective families, so long as any branch regards its own peculiar creed or practice to be binding on conscience, lesser divisions of Churches by denominational lines must be continued. Happily there is a constantly increasing tendency on the part of all the followers of Christ to see that what does not alienate men from Him may well

be questioned if set up as a sufficient justification for separation into distinct Churches.

Another obstacle is the inertia of the Churches. Most of the denominations have a great history, and are justly proud of what they have suffered and achieved. Some of them are large in membership, and have immense wealth and influence; and they are characterized by a steady growth. Under such conditions it is not strange that by a good many both of the ministry and the laity the response to arguments and appeals in favor of unification is feeble. They point to the deeper unity which subsists along with denominationalism; and to the external recognition and utilization of this unity by such means as Comity, Cooperation, Alliance and Federation. We have the essence already they say; why not be content with it? Why disturb our church life and our ecclesiastical machinery by a pursuit after something which is not vital? Thus, mere inertia, rather than positive opposition hinders progress toward unification.

The practical difficulties which can always be more or less seen as necessary to be met in all particular cases of proposed unification are a powerful deterrent influence. These in a majority of instances at first seem so great that to

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be able to overcome them is apparently almost hopeless. Sacrifices of sentiments, habits, and personal interests are involved. Were the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Congregationalists to unite, what a tremendous amount of readjustment would this necessitate in the general management of the affairs of these ecclesiastical organizations! As to the individual congregations and their places of worship, how difficult would it be to bring about the better conditions for the sake of which the three denominations joined in one! We could count upon the ministers and the membership if convinced of the righteousness and wisdom of the step, rising to the measure of unselfish devotion required; but until duty clearly is seen, the prospect of the practical difficulties must operate as a powerful deterrent.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, and many others besides, an advance has been made that is immensely encouraging; and progress tends each year to become more rapid and hopeful. In estimating this, perhaps the chief place ought to be given to the fact that the unification of the Churches is now commanding such large and thoughtful attention. It unquestionably has the ear of the Christian public as at no previous time in the modern history of Protestantism. Great

ecclesiastical assemblies, denominational, and also undenominational, consider and take action concerning it. Plans of immense scope are laid by which it is hoped to forward the movement. Big contributions of money are volunteered in order to meet expected expenses. In the public press the subject is discussed frequently, and often with fullness and ability. On many sides it is recognized as a living, burning, imperative question of tremendous importance. A hearing of this sort is just what the cause has hitherto lacked and has most needed.

The positive steps already taken toward this goal are many and long, both in Christian lands and on foreign fields, though as yet the full realization of what is possible is but dimly seen and is inadequately appreciated. The onward march is slow, and frequently there are halts and diversions on the way; yet on the whole it is not stayed. What has been accomplished ought to be a mighty stimulus to proceed farther as rapidly and as extensively as in wisdom the conditions permit. Why perpetuate a day longer than the circumstances may clearly demand, on such a field, for instance as China, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, a Congregational denomination, and others whose distinctive foreign names cannot

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be satisfactorily translated into the language, and the difference between whose American or English creeds have there been sunk out of sight? There, however, to-day they still are, in the same province, and even in the same cities. Division of territory so as not to overlap in labors, co-operation in schools, hospitals, publication, consultations in immense conferences. and the like, are good so far as they go, and deserve to be fostered: but when missionaries themselves studiously avoid denominationalism in their teachings, and the native Christians have no disposition to perpetuate it among themselves, the best thing for the future to do with it is to eliminate it entirely just so soon as this can be safely accomplished.

Here in the United States there is great reason to thank God because of what has been achieved. But why call a halt at the present stage of the movement? Why, for instance, should there be twelve distinct bodies of Presbyterians in this country? It may be easy to find members of each branch of this family who will try to justify the independent existence of their own denomination; but it would be hard indeed to find one who would also try to justify the other eleven. There are not very many people of the Presby-

terian family who will not admit that were these various branches not already in existence, the matters which separate them would by themselves in each case be considered of too small importance to warrant division into separate Churches because of them. What has just been said of Presbyterians is equally true of the other Protestant families.—the fourteen kinds of Methodists, the sixteen kinds of Baptists, the twenty-four kinds of Lutherans, and the others by whatever name they are called. The truth is that the perpetuation of this fragmentary condition within families of Churches is an anachronism; and though history may somewhat condone it as a concession to our infirmities, it will nevertheless at some time permanently record this state of things as a reproach.

To close up these family ranks is the immediate duty of the Christians of the United States. But shall we not look beyond this to a still more comprehensive unification in the future? To do so is not disloyalty to one's own denomination. It does not involve any falling out of the ranks in which one is enrolled either as a layman or as a minister. It in no measure ignores or belittles the good that has been achieved by the denominations, in spite of their separation, or by virtue

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of it. Neither does it imply any denial or any lack of appreciation of the already existing deeper spiritual oneness of all Christians by whatever name they may be called. It is thoroughly consistent with a hearty acknowledgment that together Christians in this land and in all lands now constitute a single great visible Church under the banner of Christ.

"Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued."

But it does assume that we fritter away strength by cleavage between the various corps, or regiments, or companies, and sometimes by petty jealousies; that we more or less occupy the same territory, and get in each other's way on the march; that we do not move to the assault as one combined body, but attack independently for the most part, and make of the campaign a melee rather than the advance of mighty columns between which the enemy cannot penetrate. At

the same time right here in America we may well be almost appalled by the moral and religious outlook. We are in the presence of conditions that arouse the gravest anxieties of thoughtful Christians of all denominations, and that call for the most thorough organization possible as to our forces and our efforts. For the reasons given, many of us pray that the time may be hastened when the ecclesiastical disunion now existent shall be brought to as complete an end as possible, and we are eager to do what we wisely can to approximate the accomplishment of this aim. We would neglect no other duty in order to find time or strength to perform this. We are wedded to no pet schemes for the attainment of our desire. We stretch out our hands to welcome any one who is ready to join with us in forwarding this movement, neither too fast nor too slow, and to come with us a part, or to come with us the whole of the way to this goal.

Inner, spiritual union is better than any which is wholly or mainly outward and visible. We do not question this. If either of these must be eliminated let it by all means be that which is external. Of course, this is true. But why eliminate either? The more we have of the one, the more we will also have of the other, provided

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we are always loyal to truth and righteousness. It is out of a deeper and more thoroughly pervading spiritual union of Christians that an increasing external unification of the Churches must be born if it is worth having; and if it is born of such parentage, the more will it by its reflex influence stimulate the hidden life which is common to all Christians.









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