

ARTICLE VI.

THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD AS SEEN
THROUGH HIS CHURCH.¹

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THE phenomenon of denominationalism was never so clearly or so seriously or so sanely before Christendom as it is in the white light of to-day. Turn where you will, you find honest minds probing into this question, and seeking some reasonable way out of the difficulties involved. Especially is this true in the English-speaking world, where the various phases of the problem are being vigorously and exhaustively discussed, and where considerable movements have been initiated looking to an abatement of the evils involved in what seems to be an unwarrantable multiplicity of divisions in Protestantism. The late Lambeth Conference, in throwing down the gauntlet of union by absorption, in its memorable "four articles," did but voice a sentiment which has been growing with a startling momentum among all earnest minds for more than a generation. In the face of this wide-spread tendency, each denomination has been under moral compulsion to make conscientious study of its very *raison d'être*. It would be strange, indeed, if, out of all this investigation, some remarkable and most hopeful transformations should not take place. Already the federation of the Presbyterian churches of Australasia, the coming together of the two Scotch denominations into the Free United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the federation of the Free churches in

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England, and several similar movements, more or less tentative in character, in China and Japan and India and America, make clear that an issue of vast proportions, and of the utmost significance to the kingdom of God, is upon us, and must be fairly faced.

The infelicities of Protestant denominationalism are obvious to all who give them any serious attention. They are especially in evidence wherever Christianity comes into close contact with her ancient and inveterate foes on pagan fields, or with vast bodies of worshippers of the true God in a state of arrested development, such as the Hebrew, and the oriental and mediæval (Latin), and other churches that call themselves Christian; or with an ever-present multitude of confused or doubting souls that get their moral stamina by heredity and absorption, but in the main are critical of the churches and their seemingly conflicting symbols. Even though Buddhism far outranks Christianity in the number of her warring sects; and even though Hinduism is perplexing to the extreme in the multiplicity of her types; and even though Mohammedanism has more than doubled the number of sects prophesied by Muhammad, who said, "Verily, it will happen to my people as it did to the Children of Israel. The Children of Israel were divided into seventy-two sects, and my people will be divided into seventy-three, every one of which, except one, will go to Gehenna"; and even though the opposition to Christianity at home is a veritable discordant Babel,—we are not altogether content with our Protestant divisions, nor happy over the daily evidence of their infelicities; and, all criticisms to the contrary, there is probably within these very sects a profounder grasp upon the unity of all truth, and a more sincere desire to realize that truth in harmony of thought and life, than can be found anywhere else in all the world.

Indeed, the Christian consciousness is raising on every

hand the question of the reasonableness of denominational life. The mere fact of such divisions makes certain to many minds the falsity of the whole ecclesiastical scheme, if not the religion upon which that scheme is based. Still others who continue to keep nominal connection with the church chafe under the confinement of what seem to them to be unscriptural, and unnecessary, and altogether lamentable walls of partition, that separate denomination from denomination. "Truth is one," they urge, and it should have a common expression. Still others look upon the divisions in Christendom as a necessary evil, to be patiently endured, for the time being at the least, and probably for all time, as a useful sort of thorn in the flesh. Yet no thoughtful mind can be found ready to-day to take a brief for old-fashioned sectarianism.

Just at this point two false tendencies are calling off superficial minds into hurtful lines of action. A general disgust with denominationalism is leading an alarming number of even earnest men, especially among the laboring classes, to abandon church connection altogether, and to look upon this institution as an enemy to all true advance, and even as adverse to the evolution of the essential doctrines and spirit of Jesus the Christ. At the extreme from this class is another, which would initiate radical efforts in behalf of immediate organic union. With an altogether unhistoric spirit, these last attempt to hasten the slow processes of growth, and to compel organizations quite unlike in form and spirit to amalgamate at once. The inevitable failure in this quixotic effort is sure to put off the day of any stable union of Christian forces. It is evident that both of these rash tendencies are extremely damaging to the cause of true church union, and we should find some useful way of holding and encouraging the despondent, and of restraining the doctrinaire zealots, who are still more hurtful to the cause.

To this end we need to come to a much more thorough understanding of the whole problem of denominationalism,—to search out its causes and its methods of development, and to discover its possible mission and the permanence of the same. It may be that we need to restudy the whole idea of the kingdom of God, and of the church as the main expression of that kingdom among men.

The first step in this investigation is to distinguish clearly the difference between denominationalism and sectarianism. It is probably because of a failure of both our despondent and our radical friends to make this vital distinction that they are led to unwise and hurtful action against the church. Sectarianism stands for a narrow vision of truth or alleged truth, which tends to shut out all who disagree as to the main points emphasized, or even those who raise differences of opinion as to minor particulars. It will not allow those who differ to have even a modicum of truth. A denomination, on the contrary, is a body of Christians who hold to a certain form of organization, and to certain common doctrinal beliefs, and to congenial methods of work, as being those for which they seem best fitted by temperament or environment; while at the same time they recognize that they have no monopoly of truth or wisdom, and that other men may employ other forms and to some extent hold other views, and still be tolerated, and even be coöperated with, in all service for the community. The modern attitude of most Protestant denominations toward each other has compelled us to coin the word "interdenominational"; while such a contradiction as "intersectarian" is unthinkable. The denominational spirit calls all men who look supremely to Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of mankind, and seek to obey him as the present Lord, "Christian brethren." It emphasizes the common divine leadership, and the single end toward which all honest hearts are working. It views the various

Christian bodies as only different regiments in the one great army of God, having their special appointed places in the common advance against the enemy. The *esprit de corps* generated by this close contact with congenial brethren in the same religious atmosphere makes the individual better fitted to do the service needed by the great Commander, and thus one division "provokes to good works" all the other divisions of the advancing army.

Of course we all recognize that denominationalism, in the first instance, grew out of sectarianism, and we should not in the least deny its parentage; recognizing that, with all its faults, even sectarianism had its undoubted providential mission in its day, without the fulfilling of which the broader spirit of denominationalism would have been an impossibility. Nor, again, should we turn our backs upon denominationalism because of this historic connection. It is out of the storm and stress of the heroic though often misguided zeal of our ancestors along every line of the world's work that our modern age was produced, and we need not be ashamed of our forebears for their work in the religious sphere any more than in matters political or social or economic or industrial; for they often accomplished their mission along all these lines, especially the religious, better than they knew. They were heading in the right direction generally, and we may congratulate ourselves if we do our duty as completely as they did theirs.

Undoubtedly we have still lingering in our veins much of the sectarian spirit, and ever and anon we see it vitiating our broader denominationalism. We have to grant many and grievous infelicities in our modern church life. But the true way to deal with an error is to recognize that it gets its power to stand erect only by allying itself with some form of truth. We need to bring it right out into the open, and give it every chance to exploit itself, and make evident by the utmost freedom of argument, as well

as by its fruits, just what modicum of truth it contains, and from which it obtains all the life it has; and by this generous handling, and this alone, we shall suppress the error and magnify the truth. Viewed in this light, we are in duty bound to give denominationalism a reasonable study, with the view of discovering its mission and its message; for no phenomenon of such magnitude and length of life, and vitality of being, can have flourished at the very centers of the world's best life without having had some special use for humanity. To this end it will now be necessary to review for a little the historic genesis of the modern divisions of Western Christendom, and correlate them with our Lord's ideal for his church.

In the first place, we turn our attention to the four cardinal principles laid down by Jesus, by which his followers were obviously to be guided in the organization and carrying forward of the Christian church. It is valuable to note how in this, as in so many other things, he avoided explicit commands or the planning out of details. He shows his divinity by simply enunciating great principles, leaving it to his followers to apply them, and to grow by the discipline involved in such painstaking labors.

1. Fundamental to all the others was the principle of the *individual initiative*, or of voluntariness of action. Through Jesus Christ, man as man came to his own, and with him was now lodged that freedom that maketh free indeed. Outward regulation was to have no significance, unless it harmonized with that divine law which was working within. Compulsion can have no proper place in matters of the heart. Any combination of men for the organization of a church must reckon on this principle of the individual initiative, which must lie back of all helpful socialization. When a man finds himself fundamentally out of harmony with an organization, that supreme law of voluntariness must make him free to withdraw, and, if his

own spiritual well-being demands it, to seek comrades who sympathize with his mode of thinking. The spirit of comprehension would lead him to strain a point to keep the old connection, but it would be a crime for him to carry this to the degree of self-stultification. It would be worse than schism to remain in what growingly appear to be false connections, and thus to offend conscience. He must raise his voice in protest, and reason it out with those associated with him, and win them to a better way of thinking or living; and, failing in this, to retire, and begin to do things according to a high sense of moral obligation. Jesus himself did this with the Jewish rabbinical church, and was crucified for his obedience to this law of the individual initiative.

2. He laid down the principle of the essential *spirituality* of the bond that should bind believers together in Christian fellowship. While it was inevitable that organization must be largely outward and material, and that united worship shall call into use human language, the voice, the ear in certain forms, liturgical or otherwise; we are still aware that the church, as set forth in the language of Jesus, is something more and better than all these: it is essentially a union of souls for some high spiritual end. We see this in our natural distinction between the visible and the invisible church. A bad man may outwardly connect himself with a Christian organization and be counted as a member; but he is no more truly a member of the church than tares are wheat, though rooted ever so securely. With a wide range of metaphor our Lord compressed into our poverty-stricken human speech, as best as could be done, this great thought of the essential spirituality of the bonds that bind Christian believers together into a true church. Our Lord and his disciples constituted all that is essential in church life, and yet they had little or no organization. They gave voluntary allegiance to a common

fellowship which was spiritual in its essence. Thus by word and example, again, Jesus left us this necessary principle that makes one the church. The connection between himself and his Father was spiritual, and his prayer was that the same should be true of his church.

3. In still more distinct language he formulated the principle of *variety* in unity. He came to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," but his concentration of attention upon them was for some far-reaching purpose, involving a world-redemption. He was not unaware of the vast outlying masses of humanity in desperate need of a Saviour. In one or two instances he could not refrain reaching forth the hand to succor representatives of this larger world as they forced themselves upon his attention. "Other sheep I have," he affirmed, "which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock, one shepherd." These words of our Lord, spoken on a most solemn occasion, make clear to any attentive student that the constant emphasis he lays on the individual initiative and upon the spirituality of ecclesiastical bonds, must be in harmony with the principle of a considerable variety in the make-up of the church, a comprehensiveness that would permit all types of honest hearts to feel at home there, a breadth of handling consonant with the widest diversity of inherent racial traits and temperamental differences. And so we have that fine and prophetic distinction between "many folds," and yet one flock and one Shepherd.

4. Lastly, and still more emphatically, our Lord affirms the principle of *unity* in variety. Most tenderly did it lay upon his heart that his followers should be one, even as he was one with the Father. His whole soul seemed bent upon impressing the force of this essential unity of all true believers upon his disciples. As we cannot think of heaven as having schismatic bodies, but the rather as a condition

of life where all shall work together harmoniously in the divine companionship, yet without loss of the individual initiative or of a due variety of activity in harmony with one's own taste and temperament, and with a perfect spiritual bond of union; so Jesus could not set forth an ideal principle of the life of the earthly church without placing strongly to the front the thought of its essential unity. This is indeed its consummation, the keystone in the arch, making plain "through the church the manifold (the many-sided) wisdom of God."

With these comprehensive and profound principles as their guide, the Master left his followers to work out an appropriate organization, fitted in the end to win the whole world to the truth.

It is possible here and now to indicate only the salient points in the long story of how the church was outwardly fashioned. In brief we note that the first age of the independent activity of Christians witnessed the construction of the Old-Catholic or Nicene Church, in which a mechanical unity, patterned on the Roman, imperial theory, was elaborately worked out. Here we find a powerful centralization based on essentially despotic principles, in the development of which the New Testament became a new *law*, no longer gospel; paralleling Roman law, which during that period was being reduced to a gigantic system. While this mechanical unity of the church fitted into the work of that great age with astonishing nicety, and could not fatally or signally check the advance of this young giant among the religions of the earth, we are sure it was so much at variance with the principles of organization laid down by our Lord, that, as there was to be a "decline and fall" of the Roman Empire, so must any merely mechanical theory of church organization at last break down, whenever new conditions should arise to put it to the su-

preme test. That time came when the churches of the Eastern Mediterranean regions settled down content with a traditional system, and to lead a mechanical life, and to experience a growing restiveness at any advance made necessary when the Teuton, with his "incorrigible individualism," appeared. The whole church, East and West, under the successors of Constantine, had become simply a department of the state, a bureau of religion in the orientalized, despotic, Roman system of government. The dry-rot of officialism had thrown the church into a semi-comatose condition; its magnificent onward sweep was checked, and the fate of the world hung in the balance.

It was the sledge-hammer of the Teutonic tribes, already half-Christian, as they deployed down the peninsulas of Southwestern Europe, that broke up that mechanical unity of the Old-Catholic Church in the West, and saved Latin Christianity at the time of its gravest peril. The Eastern Church was unaffected, and has slumbered on.

But, thanks to the Teuton, the West awoke; the Latin Church, with veins filled with new blood, plunged into the forests of Central and Northern Europe, and, with a heroism rarely matched, did the best it could for humanity, by adapting itself to its new environment, and working out through the Germanic races its problem of the ages.

But here again we find an inevitable difficulty. In emphasizing the individual, the Teuton forgot the wholeness of society, and the consequence was that the temporarily disintegrating forces of feudalism shattered what before had been the dangerous, mechanical unity of the church. Western Christianity had now to bend before the storm of a wild but much-needed transitional age, and help it voice its message to the world. All the unity it could retain was a nominal one. The bishop of Rome became the weakest of all suzerains, and chaos overtook the church as it did society in general. The great archbishops, like puis-

sant barons, oppressed the bishops and the lower clergy, and fought the popes, who were vainly bolstered up by the pseudo-Isidorian decretals.

Then arose new centralizing forces in the more spiritual congregation of the Clugny monasteries. Mighty men like Hildebrand and Innocent III. brought in the theocratic church of the crusading days, going to the very opposite pole from feudalism. Indeed, they constructed a new imperialism, which, though undoubtedly more spiritual on the whole, was even more insistently mechanical than the Roman, and easily succumbed to the half-pagan renaissance.

Again the Teuton came to the rescue with the rise of Germanic mysticism and the truly Christian renaissance which terminated in the Reformation. Then was added to the Greek and Latin divisions in Christendom, Protestantism, which, in the battle of the great Confessions (Augsburg, Heidelberg, the Thirty-nine Articles, Dort, and Westminster), made evident, by its continuance of the persecuting spirit, that it also was not yet freed from absolutist tendencies. Indeed, each of the great subdivisions of the Christian world in all their ramifications had its special rigid form of church life, which out-Heroded Herod in its jealous bitterness, and no corner of Europe or America was without its own type of inquisition. The mighty currents of the mediæval and modern periods met just at this juncture, resulting in the saddest era in human history.

It was the Teuton who again took the lead in finding the way out, and William III., of Holland, was enabled, on the larger arena of the British Empire, to work out the far-reaching thought of toleration. His edict of 1689 began a new era in the story of human progress.

When once the pressure of a mechanical unity was taken off, occidental Christianity immediately took advantage of the new and unwonted freedom, and ran to excess in a rap-

turous expression of its love for truth and an individual development of the same. A new feudalism arose in the Protestant world; this time without even a nominal suzerain. Sect after sect, with a profound earnestness of conviction, seized upon what it considered its own territory, threw up its earthworks, and built its castle for offense as well as defense, its cannon shotted with strenuous words, and its chivalry doing doughty deeds of valor with the Damascus blade of logic and invective. It seemed at first as though the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and that Christendom was hopelessly shattered. Each little ecclesiastical body—Friend, Congregationalist, Baptist, Methodist, and so on to the number of one hundred and fifty and more sects—sent forth its protest against all comers, often with the bitterness of a Muhammad committing all heresiarchs to Gehenna.

But, in spite of it all, it was of unspeakable importance to the world to have Christ's principle of individual initiative and voluntariness of action made clear as daylight; the fact that each man has a right and a bounden duty to believe and worship according to the dictates of his own conscience, provided he do his neighbor no civil wrong. It seemed necessary at last, on a world-arena, to have this scriptural principle of religious freedom, involved in the divine right of conscience, worked out until it could be no longer a moot-point, but, the rather, an axiom and a commonplace, the dispute of which would indicate so gross an ignorance as to suggest mental unbalance.

The formal union of Christians, whatever else it is, must be a spiritual union, a true, living organism surcharged with a common soul-vitality. Outward *compulsion* as to creed and form of worship needed to be proved to all to be an anomaly, a blight, a pagan thing, unworthy of Christ's gospel. The time had now come, in the ongoing of the kingdom of God, when men were to be called upon to put

a great trust in truth *as such*, and in the natural hunger of the heart of the common man for that truth, for which indeed he was created in the image of his Maker. All minds must be persuaded of the power of truth to win, though the heavens fall. The homely adage has become current, and prophetic of the new outlook,—“Truth gets well though she be run over by a locomotive, while error dies of lockjaw though she but scratch her finger.”

When the era of toleration came, and men increasingly were given the right to follow freely the convictions of conscience, the fundamental truths of religion were seen to be invincible, and to be far more fruitful than ever they were in the days of mechanical control by the state. The glaring faults of sectarianism, which became at once most grievously evident, were far more than made up for by the power its freedom has shown to emphasize the scriptural principles at stake, and to hasten forward the missionary spread of Christianity at home and abroad.

We are too near the event, as yet, to give an altogether comprehensive judgment as to the wisdom or unwisdom of sectarianism. The smoke of the battle has only just begun to lift, and to develop the harsher initial form in which ecclesiastical freedom expressed itself into denominationalism; but all that we can make out from the data at hand, points emphatically to a favorable verdict, whatever the incidental infelicities involved, as to the evident place this phase of ecclesiastical sectarian development has taken in the progress of the truth.

Mediæval feudalism, that earlier expression of the spirit of Teutonic individualism in the political sphere, received its death-blow in the Crusades,—when the robber-barons of Western Europe gave over for the nonce their petty warfare, and marched side by side to the distant “Holy War,” sharing together the hardships and glories of the long struggle for the reputed sepulcher of their blessed

Lord. In all this experience, they found each other out. The different dialects of Gallic lands were *merged* on that distant field of war, and the knights of that whole section of Europe came home from the crusades *Frenchmen* in a new sense, and modern united France was born. So with the Germans and Italians and Spaniards and English. They went forth to capture the "Holy Sepulcher," but were themselves captured by the still holier insignia of a national unity, and patriotism welded them together for greatest civic ends.

So again in our modern age of Protestant feudalism, when one sect stood opposed to all comers, and attempted to erect its barriers to the skies, the call of God came for a new and vaster crusade, not to rescue a Holy Sepulcher from the "infidel," but to aid in the saving of the soul and life of even the last and lowest fellow-man, for whom Christ died and rose again, not to speak of the millions of the *great* races and civilizations still in heathen darkness. It has been the blessed result of the Foreign Mission cause, not only to lay solidly in every dark land the foundations of the Kingdom of Righteousness, but, with almost an equal significance, to bring together in close and helpful fellowship the various sectarian regiments of God's great army. On that distant battle-field, in the face of a vastly outnumbering foe who were entrenched in an age-long superstition, the devoted missionaries of the cross, hailing from all the great progressive Protestant sects, have clasped hands. They have found each other out. Their differences have paled before the fact of their predominate likenesses. They have discovered the essentials of the faith in the hearts of those upon whom in the *homeland* they had looked askance. The mighty flood-tide of Christian fraternity has set back to their ecclesiastical constituencies, and the walls of sectarianism have all but disappeared, and we have found out not only that we have a common

Heavenly Father, but that we are indeed brethren. Modern tolerant denominationalism has succeeded to all the genuine values of sectarianism, but has discarded, for good and all, most of the evils of that immature stage of religious development. The last generation witnessed the turn of the tide, especially in America, where denominationalism has more and more taken possession, until it has come to pass that that religious body which will not coöperate in the common work for the spiritual uplift of the community is increasingly considered schismatic. Great Britain and her colonies are a good second in the onward march toward fundamental unity of ecclesiastical life; in many particulars being in advance of us. For the most part, denominationalism is on the old alignment of sectarianism, though we see a tendency in many of the sects, that have natural temperamental or racial affinities, to amalgamate, and every day sees a distinct advance toward coöperation.

One fact demands particular attention. We note a certain clearly perceptible lessening of moral earnestness among these more tolerant denominations. Men understood the sharp contention of the sects. Even those outside the churches took an interest in the theological and ethical battles of the partisan religious giants of the age of Puritanism. There was something exhilarating in the clash of debate and fiery invective which appealed to the militant taste. Whatever other opinions the onlooking world had as to this warfare, they felt sure the champions were dead in earnest. The same great majority to-day do not so well understand the seeming half-way position of the churches, and are waiting to see sure tokens of a new moral earnestness. They are restive and suspicious at the unwonted spectacle of a truce in the religious sectarian warfare. To many minds, and earnest ones too, both within and without the church, there seems to be an evident letting down of the heroic standard, and the distinction be-

tween Christians and non-Christians in a given community appears well-nigh obliterated.

We are undoubtedly at the parting of the ways. A crisis has come to the kingdom of God as grave and full of peril, as well as of promise, as it has ever been called upon to face. The question of the hour is—how to combine the four principles of organic church life made plain by our Lord, to which reference has been made in earlier paragraphs, and by a wise application of the same to *re-form* the battalions of the Christian army, now deployed to the ends of the earth, and to hurl it as one, and with the utmost effectiveness, upon what the Apostle Paul would have called “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

President Roosevelt has recently pointed out that the newest military tactics emphasize the importance of the individual man, doing his duty just where he is placed,—often seemingly alone, but sharing in the glory of the victory, even though he toil at the *coal-bunker* in the depths of the roaring, panting, trembling leviathan of modern naval warfare. So, in the coming of the kingdom of God, success must depend, in the last resort, upon the heroic element in the individual, who voluntarily puts his life at the Master's disposal, enlisting for the whole long war, to be depended upon to obey all rightful leadership, and to seek the same with a prayerful and diligent humility; but, in lieu of clear outward direction, to go straight forward as God makes plain, doing each his “duty on his parallel of latitude.” So may the church accomplish her great work, and hasten the time when “every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

But right alongside of this cardinal principle of the individual initiative stands another of equal importance, which we have previously noted as that of the *spiritual* nature of the bond of organic union. Mechanical unity

has thrice proved useless for any other than a temporary end, and to be harmful and even destructive in the final issue. Roman imperialism, mediæval theocracy, and Puritan absolutism can be of no further possible use even as temporary resorts. As the "Persons" of the Godhead are bound together in mystic union, so must brethren in the church universal, in some very real way, be related to each other and to their Master. "That they may be one as we are one," were the solemn words of the praying Lord. We may not fully explain it or even understand it, for it, too, is a mystic union; the church in the daring metaphor of the New Testament being designated as the "Bride" of Christ. We find it natural to talk of the spiritual union of the believer with his Redeemer, and it needs constant emphasis that it is equally natural and reasonable to talk of the spirituality of the bond that links a church of believers together and to Christ. Indeed, the church will have power with men only as she makes evident that she is something more than a building, an organization, a form of worship, or even a means to an end, however altruistic. She may be all this, and fail. Just as marriage is a pitiable failure unless the *spiritual* union, dominated and chastened by sincere love, is a more certain fact than the outward and physical union; so the church is a hollow mockery without the spiritual bond, holding believers together and being the predominate fact in her life. Denominationalism has, to a degree, emphasized this inner and less material nature of the kingdom of God in general, and the union of believers in the individual church. It has felt sure that brotherly love must be truly present in the holy bonds that make the churchly family one in some very real sense. We have felt the necessity of covenanting together in public witness of this profoundly spiritual experience. We cannot believe that any development of church life can be scriptural or helpful which denies or neglects this fundamental proposition.

Then comes the principle of variety in unity. No *state* church has ever been able to be a comprehensive church. Acts of uniformity have proved themselves to be inevitable whenever the external governing power has undertaken to control or even guide religion. The church of the future, accepting the New Testament axiom of a reasonable variety, must take into fullest account the natural cleavages among men,—such as race, and degree of intellectual grasp and temperament,—and find within its bounds an appropriate place for every honest heart. Denominationalism has been rehearsing on a comparatively small scale what the church universal shall, when it realizes itself, find grace and wisdom to make a part of its organic structure. Any attempt to obliterate the “many folds” in the supposed interests of the “one flock” will prove not only unscriptural but unchristian, and against the very nature with which God has endowed mankind.

But the principle laid down by our blessed Lord that demands *most* emphatic attention from his followers to-day, because in part it is less thoroughly worked out, is that of *unity in variety*. We are facing just here that phase of the church's life where the failure in the past has been most signal. We realize to the full the difficulties in the way. Never before has the problem come up under similar circumstances. Constitutional government, in one form or another, prevails in all the countries that stand to the front in the world's best life; and international law, which is Christian law, controls even the waste places of the earth. Toleration in religious affairs is in the spirit, if not in the letter, of that law. The world has become one as it never has been before. The electric message girdles the globe in “forty seconds.” The nations of the world, willy-nilly, have come into close touch, and truth has at once a world-audience. The mighty thought of the unity and brotherhood of the race has brought up for a fresh so-

lution the question of the essential unity of the church and its world-mission. In the light of the three other principles laid down by Jesus, we must now find how to carry out the fourth, and make the church one, so that his prayer shall be answered, and "the world may believe that" the Father indeed has sent him. The transformation of sectarianism into denominationalism has been one step in the direction of the answer to that prayer. We are now doubtless to be asked at this crisis to take the next step in the divinely indicated way, with our hands in that scarred Hand, which leads us on.

What, then, at this most critical juncture, is the practical thing to be done by the churches of Christendom? Certain we are, nothing can be wisely attempted in haste. Any fruitful and lasting accomplishment along the line of union must be a growth,—“first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.” Hothouse “forcing” can only do damage. We must not break with the past. The historic spirit must be cultivated, which enables one to look upon other ages and other forms of activity with a magnanimity which sees the kernels of wheat among the chaff, and to thank God for them.

One thing is certain. Each great denomination should make a fresh study of its own life, and come to a new self-realization, that it may more fully appreciate the special mission Providence has most evidently put into its hands for thorough accomplishment; that it may avoid a multiplicity of side-issues that have crept in through a merely sectarian spirit; and that it may prayerfully go forward to the remaining task set it by the one Leader, and by personal contact with him more fully imbibe his spirit.

Is it not equally evident that it is also a present duty for the members of each denomination to make a most careful and sympathetic study of the elements of power in all the other denominations,—especially those close at hand, with

which we are already coöperating in many useful ways. We are sure our own denomination has its divinely appointed task; and it is more and more borne in upon us that the All-Father has likewise placed a special mission in the hands of our Christian brethren in the other denominations. We need, for our own good and for the common good, to realize that "special mission" in all its length and breadth and height and depth.

This will inevitably greatly intensify the cordiality of interdenominational fellowship, and lead, more and more, to harmonious activity against the common enemy, "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering forbearing one another in love, giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Is it not inevitable, that in the near future, nay at once, such a brotherly attitude shall lead us to make common cause in some practicable form of federation in denominational work, which shall not only greatly economize the present heavy expenditure of money and still more precious life at home and abroad, but also shall help to present to the world at large the reality of the essential unity of the Christian church in all the world, and which, through the very sacrifices it shall call upon us all to make, shall awaken a new moral earnestness, which shall lead on to the speedy triumph of the kingdom of God? Then shall we begin adequately to recognize the unity of "every family in heaven and on earth. . . . One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all," and have clear vision of "the manifold (many-sided) wisdom of God" as seen through his church.