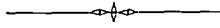


our souls, and the way in which His words have been interpreted for us by His inspired Apostle.¹

N. DIMOCK.

(To be continued.)



ART. VI.—CHRISTIAN UNITY.

IN the view of our Lord, the strongest argument which could be addressed to mankind in evidence of His mission and revelation would be, to all time and in every generation, the unity of His disciples and adherents amongst themselves. *That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.* Not of less moment would it be than their fellowship with Almighty God. To us, who are so accustomed to the divisions amongst Christians from the age of St. John to the era of the 240 Protestant sects of England that such disunion seems almost an inseparable ingredient in the earthly embodiment of our faith, these words have but a dim and distant sound. It is true that great men, and patient students of the meaning and bearing of the Lord's teaching, will always be alive to the importance of the very least of His suggestions and commandments. But the ordinary Christian, so long as he is fairly true to the model of faith and practice with which he is familiar, and to which his conscience is related, thinks little of the pressing and supreme duty of unity. He acquiesces in the beautiful prayer of Bishop Gunning, that *all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in the unity of the Spirit, and in the bond of peace.* But he assumes that this implies a duty rather on the part of those who do not agree with his own profession; for himself it suggests nothing but pious aspirations. If the petition is ever to be answered, he has in his mind a hazy picture of the Pope descending from his throne,

("Christ's Discourse at Capernaum," Introd., p. xxxiii.). But so long as we possess the faculties of intuition and common-sense, it is incredible that—according to God's will and purpose—these should be ordered out of court, when they are fully conscious that they can give important or conclusive evidence on a controverted question (see "Eucharistic Worship," pp. 172-175). And it will be found that the truth of this principle is fully recognised by Mr. Faber himself in pages 51, 52, and 60 of the same treatise.

Even T. Aquinas maintains: "In hoc sacramento veritatis, sensus non decipitur circa ea, quorum iudicium ad ipsum pertinet, inter quæ est fractio" ("Sum.," par. iii., vol. ii.; Quæst., lxxvii., art. vii.).

¹ See "Eucharistic Worship," pp. 177, 178.

of the Roman Church abrogating the decrees of the Council of Trent and the Council of the Vatican, of the Nonconformist reluctantly resigning the Westminster Confession, of the Lutheran remedying the defects of his Apostolical Succession, of the Presbyterian accepting Episcopal ordination, and of all joining together in some General Council of the whole of modern Christendom to produce a universal substitute for the Thirty-nine Articles. He conscientiously believes, in short, that it is others who err against unity, and who hinder the fulfilment of our Lord's Prayer, and who obstruct the conversion of the world—not himself. I do not forget that there are some who think that as the Roman Communion is the most ancient and the most powerful representative of the visible Body of Christ, and as the Eastern Churches, in spite of their doctrinal and historical split, approach very near to the Church of Rome in their customs and types of devotion, therefore the more closely we Englishmen could return to those customs and types, so much the more earnestly and hopefully should we be promoting the possibility of a restoration of external unity. But such a theory leaves out the fact that nothing will satisfy the Roman Church except entire surrender. It omits from its calculation the Christianity of Germany, of Scandinavia, of Scotland, of Switzerland, of Holland, of the majority of Americans, and of the millions of English Nonconformists. These great peoples and masses of men such backward steps would only repel further, instead of attracting and winning. It does not appear to estimate the primitiveness or truth of the practices and types to which it proposes assimilation. And it forgets that England, having once passed through the fiery crisis of the Reformation, can never as a people retrace its steps. It is not in this direction that the unity is to be found for which Christ with His dying breath prayed. And, indeed, the aspiration for a new General Council, however sound and wholesome it may be in itself, is so remote from all reckoning of probability, that it does not in the slightest degree relieve us from the paramount duty of cultivating the spirit of unity in the sphere in which we are ourselves, each of us, practically concerned.

That it is a matter of supreme and vital moment could not seriously be doubted, even if we had not those impressive words of the Lord Jesus. Even the heathens could tell us that. "*It is unity that preserves the State,*" said the old Roman Consul, Menenius Agrippa, after one of his victories. "*Nothing is more pleasing to the gods,*" said Socrates, "*than to see brethren dwell together in unity.*" It is the disunion of Christians which each of our foreign evangelists laments as the severest obstacle to the acceptance of the Kingdom of

Christ. It is the miserable divisions and subdivisions at home which waste the energies of Christians, which divert them from their glorious progress of triumph over sin and sorrow, which inflame their minds with narrowness and bigotry, which enable infidelity to steal marches upon us and to appropriate the fruits of what is truly Christian work, which prevent our children from receiving a full instruction in Christian duty, which fill the world with inextinguishable scorn and laughter, which hide from the eyes of unbelievers the divine beauty and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. "*Unity is the strength, and division is the ruin, of any body politic,*" wrote Lord Burleigh. "*Separate,*" said another, "*the atoms which make the hammer, and each would fall on the stone as a snowflake; but welded into one, and wielded by the firm arm of the quarryman, it will break the massive rocks asunder. Divide the waters of Niagara into distinct and individual drops, and they would be no more than the falling rain; but in their united body they would quench the fires of Vesuvius.*" Whether we look at Christendom as a whole, or at English Christianity in particular, it is the same. Everywhere the outward body of the Church, and its inward operation and capability, are blocked and clogged by the self-will of disunion.

As to what our Lord meant, there can be little doubt. It was, as usual, a spiritual, not a mere external, truth which He intended to emphasize. It is the unity of Christians in the spirit of faith and love, by each holding firmly to the Head. *By Him*, not by any external machinery, however necessary that may be, *all the body, by joints and nerves, having nourishment ministered, increaseth with the increase of God.* There is but one condition for Christians; if they are crucified to the world, if they have presented their own wills a sacrifice of love to the Lord, then in faith and in love will their unity appear. The one point is, vital union with Christ. They may not be conscious each of the other's existence; they may not belong to the same organization; they may not speak the same language, literary or ecclesiastical; but, all the same, the spiritual likeness which has been reproduced in them by the Divine Presence is actually the reflection of the union which subsists between the Father and the Son. And it is not a mere moral harmony of sympathy, but a community of the same spiritual life; of the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ all who love Him in sincerity cannot help partaking. Christ is the divine harmony of all human discords; and Christians are one with each other just in proportion as they are one with Him. He who has the spirit of Christ can know no bigotry, no spiritual pride, no suspicion, no jealousy, no party animosity,

no censoriousness. He who has drunk of the Spirit of Christ cannot but spontaneously rejoice that he that is not against us is on our side. He cannot but be glad when, for all the sadness of human barriers of separation, he consoles himself with the remembrance that *wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, there is He in the midst of them*. What if no intimation whatever has been given us of a visible centre of unity on earth? What if adaptations of organization and differences of forms of worship were allowed to be developed in various ways? In the Apostolical age itself there were considerable divergences between the Christians who were Jews and the Christians who were Gentiles; between the doctrinal system of St. Paul and the doctrinal system of St. James; and yet there was essential harmony in the one Lord. Christian unity is untrammelled, and may imply the greatest variety of types and phases of Christian life. Between Christian unity and Christian liberty there is no contradiction; they are forces which mutually fulfil and sustain each other. Just as these words of our Lord were the extinction of all validity of difference in the world as it then was, so, by anticipation, it has taken away all the bitterness from the unavoidable diversities of the modern Church. Diversities there are, and must be; we cannot help them; but they need not be fatal to spiritual fellowship. In the proper treatment of these diversities unity itself may be secured, and even illustrated. An enforced, external unity must be deceptive; it is incompatible with human imperfections. The essential unity of all who believe lies in the one Word on which faith rests; in the one aim of the one Way, the one Truth, the one Life; in the imitation of the one Lord and Shepherd; in the one grace and the one Spirit, by Whom all alike have access to the one Father. According to the proportion of their faith they know and live in believing. In those who have had the grace to sacrifice their own will to the will of the Lord, to be consecrated by their faith in His Cross, to be renewed by their communion with His Spirit, to be assimilated by their study of His life, an essential unity of type will reappear under all circumstances, in all times, and in all places. And it will not be only amongst those who live near together, and who know each other, and are conscious of their unity. It will be just the same amongst men who are divided widely as the poles asunder by geographical accident, or by historical antecedents, or by the lapse of centuries. In all countries, in all times—distant from each other, unknown to each other, separated from each other—they are all one and the same in Christ Jesus.

This is our consolation. But it does not lead us to under-

value the historical position of the great Church to which we belong. There is nothing in this consciousness of spiritual unity antagonistic to the most earnest loyalty and the most devout value for the inheritance which in God's mercy has been handed down to us by the fidelity of past ages. What we need in these days to realize is that there is nothing derogatory to the strongest personal convictions, nothing which would impair the profoundest and strictest loyalty, on the one side or on the other, in being willing to recognize the facts of the legacies of division which have been bequeathed to us by the inexorable course of history. That willingness is the contribution which is required of each of us to the spirit of unity. Rather, the more conscientiously and the more enthusiastically we hold our own to be the best way, so much the more will it help our faith, and strengthen our position, and clear our mind of difficulties, if we are able to rejoice in the belief and the remembrance that, in spite of all inexplicable divergences, all are united to the same Head; all are, in mysterious ways which we cannot measure, members of the same spiritual body; all are partakers of the one Divine Spirit which is as the wind that bloweth where it listeth; all look forward to the one hope of our calling; all are servants of the same Lord, all are adherents of the same grand simple elements of faith, all have received the *one baptism*, all are children of the *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all*.

It is grievous to look back at the mistakes of the past. The Roman Catholics represent three disastrous ideas: the idea of one diocese and bishop lording it over the whole of God's heritage; the idea of the development of doctrines not revealed in the Word of God; and the idea of the equality of poor fallible human tradition as an authority with the words and teaching of Christ and His Apostles. Resting on these three ideas, they excommunicate absolutely all who do not agree with them. The Independents or Congregationalists represent the idea of individual liberty, and the freedom of congregations to choose their own pastor. The principle of election ought certainly to have been always recognised in the Church; and as for individual liberty, so harsh and rigid was the tyranny of Archbishop Laud that we cannot be surprised at the rapid growth of Independent opinions. At the Restoration most of them might again have been absorbed into the great national communion, but, unhappily, the statesmen and prelates who framed the Act of Uniformity in the reign of Charles II., contrived it on purpose to exclude the Congregationalists; and so the division became irreconcilable. The Presbyterians represent the principle of the original identity of presbyters

and bishops. That brings them very near indeed to ourselves. Many High Church Bishops have been inclined to recognise Presbyterian succession and orders. They were right in protesting against an episcopal rule which had degenerated from the primitive standard of a bishop ruling with the consent of his presbyters, into an autocracy, as it once seemed, resting on the power of the secular arm. The Baptists represent the principle that although infant baptism is the primitive rule, yet adult baptism may be equally acceptable to God. Whenever infant baptism degenerated into a mere mechanical performance without a living faith on the part of minister, parents, sponsors or congregation, there was the natural inducement to Baptist principles. The life of the Puritan party was the intense belief in God's government of the world, and its stern ascetic piety, in contrast with the lukewarm faith and lax lives of the mass of the orthodox. The Wesleyan movement, which was originated and conducted by clergymen of the Church of England, was a revival of the ancient discipline of the Church; it was not merely the love of autocratic power in the leaders of the movement, but want of confidence in the lawful authorities into whose hands that discipline ought to have been committed, which led to the hardening of the society into a sect. Even of Unitarianism it may be said that it owes its continued life, as it owed its origin, to its maintenance of the unity of the Deity as against the tritheism of much of our popular religious tone and habit of mind.

Under these circumstances, and with all these past mistakes in view, we ought to be very humble in our attitude, charitable in our judgment, and tender and respectful towards those who differ from us. While conscientiously holding to our own views as the truest and most reasonable, we ought not to act as if no other view was possible to minds differently treated and in different circumstances from our own. We ought to be looking for points of agreement instead of points of difference. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, one Holy Spirit, one invisible body (the ideal Church of Christ), one Atonement for sin, one right of prayer, one hope of immortal life, one repentance, one Christian love; surely these elements, besides an infinity of others that we hold in common, are already much!

That is, at any rate, the view of our Bishops. At the last Lambeth Conference they issued to us the following instruction on the subject in their encyclical letter:

“After anxious discussion, we have resolved to content ourselves with laying down certain articles as a basis on which approach may be, by God's blessing, made towards Home

Reunion. These articles, four in number, will be found in the appended Resolutions.

"The attitude of the Anglican Communion towards the religious bodies now separated from it by unhappy divisions would appear to be this: We hold ourselves in readiness to enter into brotherly conference with any of those who may desire intercommunion with us in a more or less perfect form. We lay down conditions on which such intercommunion is, in our opinion, and according to our conviction, possible. For, however we may long to embrace those now alienated from us, so that the ideal of the one flock under the one Shepherd may be realized, we must not be unfaithful stewards of the great deposit entrusted to us. We cannot desert our position either as to faith or discipline. That concord would, in our judgment, be neither true nor desirable which should be produced by such surrender.

"But we gladly and thankfully recognise the real religious work which is carried on by Christian bodies not of our Communion. We cannot close our eyes to the visible blessing which has been vouchsafed to their labours for Christ's sake. Let us not be misunderstood on this point. We are not insensible to the strong ties, the rooted convictions which attach them to their present position. These we respect, as we wish that on our side our own principles and feelings may be respected. Competent observers, indeed, assert that not in England only, but in all parts of the Christian world, there is a real yearning for unity—that men's hearts are moved more than heretofore towards Christian fellowship. The Conference has shown in its discussions, as well as its resolutions, that it is deeply penetrated with this feeling. May the Spirit of Love move on the troubled waters of religious differences."

The Special Committee of Bishops also sent in the following recommendation:

"That the constituted authorities of the various branches of our Communion, acting, so far as may be, in concert with one another, be earnestly requested to make it known that they hold themselves in readiness to enter into brotherly conference (such as that which has already been proposed by the Church in the United States of America) with the representatives of other chief Christian Communions in the English-speaking races, in order to consider what steps can be taken, either towards corporate reunion, or towards such relations as may prepare the way for fuller organic unity hereafter."

They added that they could not conclude their report without laying before the Conference the following suggestion, unanimously adopted by the committee:

"That the Conference recommend as of great importance, in

tending to bring about reunion, the dissemination of information respecting the standards of doctrine, and the formularies in use in the Anglican Church; and that information be disseminated, on the other hand, respecting the authoritative standards of doctrine, worship, and government adopted by the other bodies of Christians into which the English-speaking races are divided.

"They also desire—following in this respect the example of the Convocation of Canterbury—to pray the Conference to commend this matter of reunion to the special prayers of all Christian people, both within and (so far as it may rightly do so) without our Communion, in preparation for the conferences which have been suggested, and while such conferences are going on; and they trust that the present Lambeth Conference may also see fit to issue, or to pray his grace the President to issue, some pastoral letter to all Christian people upon this all-important subject. For never certainly did the Church of Christ need more urgently the spirit of wisdom and of love, which He alone can bestow, who is 'the Author and Giver of all good things.'"

Are we doing what we can to carry out the suggestions of the Bishops and the instructions of the Lambeth Conference? If we are indeed sincere and genuine disciples of our Master, we shall each of us try to make personal friends of any Nonconformists that we meet, and endeavour to learn from them some Christian grace or virtue. We shall try by the consistency of our lives, the earnestness of our faith, and the width of our charity, to recommend to others the principles that we hold to be true. We shall take every opportunity of joining together on religious and philanthropic platforms in all good works. Throughout every town, and in every country village, we shall do our utmost to make those who do not agree with us feel that there is no social ban upon them because they are unable to subscribe to the national organization of religion. Outward and formal unity we cannot at present expect; the lines of division sunk by the mistakes of the past are still too deep. But we can all strive for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. For that we can all daily and earnestly pray. And some day, in God's own good time, some great fervour of love will overspread the land like the universal dawn of a calm and cloudless summer day; and barriers will be broken down, and prejudices will be discarded, and misunderstandings cleared up, and we shall find that by each coming as close as we can to the Lord Jesus Christ, we have come close to each other also.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.