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[*Cheltenham Conference Paper.*]

FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCHES :

(b) IN THE DOMINIONS.¹

III.

BY THE REV. GEORGE F. IRWIN, B.D., Vicar of Wallington,
Surrey.

I THINK the Conference has been very fortunate in having the clear statement given by Dr. Mullins of the numerical position of the Anglican communion in the Dominions, and of the relations between it and the Roman communion on the one hand and the non-Episcopal Churches on the other. Many facts are pointing to the absolute necessity of union among the Christian Churches. One of the speakers at this Conference has pointed out that the condition of the world demands it. May I mention one matter of significance? For last Empire Day *The Times* prepared an *Empire Supplement*, dealing with practically every aspect of life in our Dominions except one. There were articles dealing with industry, commerce, finance, agriculture, and even athletics, but there were only two references to religion, both of them in a measure depreciatory of mission work. To those of us who believe that the future of the Empire depends before all on the spiritual and moral qualities of its people, this is a startling omission. It shows the indifference of the average man to religious interests, but it could not have occurred if the Christianity of the Empire were a united force. Journalists require to be careful not to offend contending interests, and it would have been difficult to deal with the Christianity of the Empire in such a way as to satisfy every section of its divided forces. In contrast, may I point out that in yesterday's (June 2) *Times* a leading article over a column in length is given to the Pope's decision to receive sovereigns at the Vatican.

I had reason to go through the Reports of the Pan-Anglican Congress of 1908 a short time ago, and I read with special interest the portions dealing with the Anglican communion in the Dominions. Three chief points seem to stand out prominently: (1) That the Anglican communion was unable of itself to overtake the growing needs of the increasing population of the oversea Dominions; (2) that great waste was caused by the overlapping of the various Christian Churches. Churches were multiplied in small towns and in districts where the population did not warrant them; (3) and that the Church of Rome was strong in organization and in the outstanding position it obtained by its organized plan of advance. It is well known that in every likely district where a town may arise, the Roman Church secures a large section of land in a central position, and when the town is formed the portions that are not required are sold at a large profit and the proceeds used for the erection of an imposing block of buildings. The Roman Church and

¹ Summary of an address.

buildings are thus a prominent feature everywhere. In addition to this, large blocks of land are secured and filled with a compact body of Roman Catholic settlers. In Australia the Roman Church uses all its power to secure an advantageous position, especially in educational matters.

These facts of 1908 hold good to-day, and they form a powerful argument for the union of the Churches of the Reformation. At the same time, speaker after speaker at the Pan-Anglican Congress deprecated any action which might ultimately retard union with the Roman and Greek Churches. But with regard to this it is perhaps sufficient to say, as has already been said at the Conference, to delay action on this account is to fail to follow the Spirit of God. We hope that reunion with the Roman Church may be possible some day, but it cannot be until that Church is reformed. There is little hope of reformation at present, and we may well bear in mind Professor Gwatkin's remarkable words: "For an infallible Church reformation is suicide." There is no doubt that union will come among the Churches of the Reformation, especially in the Mission Field. If we are left out, the advantages that are claimed for our central position will be of little practical value to us. Let us press for the unity of the Reformed Churches. Let us start from the point of the spiritual union already existing—the union in Christ. That spiritual fact prepares the way for the further work of the Holy Spirit, and His guidance may well be followed to a wide comprehensive unity that need not imply uniformity.

Humanly speaking, everything depends on the Lambeth Conference. We know the result of the action of the Conference of 1908 in regard to the proposals put forward in 1906 for the union of the English Church and the Presbyterian Church in Australia. After the decision of the Lambeth Conference they were referred back to their respective Churches, and no action has since been taken. We hope that the Lambeth Conference this year will continue the advance that has marked the last three Conferences. During these years they have advanced from a quiescent to an active attitude in regard to reunion. In 1888 the Bishops were prepared to receive advances from other Christian communions. They held themselves in readiness to enter into brotherly conference with their representatives. In 1897 they advanced to the position that they were to watch for opportunities of united prayer and mutual conference, but in 1908 they suggested that advances might be made, and even suggested that reunion might be possible on the basis of consecrations to the Episcopate on lines suggested by such precedents as those of 1610. May we not hope that in 1920 a further step will be taken, and that the Conference will originate definite action to remove the obstacles that block the path. Otherwise, as has been pointed out at this Conference, our Church is preparing for itself a position of unfortunate isolation in the English-speaking world, and especially in the Mission Field.