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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT.

This number of the Union Seminary Review is devoted largely to the vital question of Presbyterian Union or Federation. There is no more important question before our Church at this time. The following letter which was addressed by the editor to nine Southern Presbyterian ministers in nine capital cities will explain the way in which the thoughtful articles which go to make up this issue of the Review were secured:

"Last May the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., appointed a committee to confer with our Church on organic union and requested our Assembly to appoint a similar committee to confer with their committee (see Minutes of our Assembly, p. 27). Our Assembly in reply appointed a committee to consider the question of the federation of all the Presbyterian bodies in the United States (see Minutes of our Assembly, p. 53). These two committees have held a joint conference in Atlantic City and will hold another meeting in Richmond on December the 18th.

It is evident that there is a great deal of unrest in both of these great Presbyterian Churches as to the present relationship existing between them and as to the relationship existing between the various Presbyterian bodies in this country. It is also evident that there are many in our own Church who feel that something ought to be done. This feeling is intensified by the reports of unrest which come from some of the border States where the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., and the

ORGANIC UNION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES.

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There is one question that will not down, or at least will not stay down for very long at a time. It is the question of some closer relationship between the two leading Presbyterian denominations in our country, Presbyterians U. S. and Presbyterians U. S. A., or Presbyterians "South" and Presbyterians "North," as they are commonly spoken of. It seems that it ought to be easy enough to strike off the "A." and make us all Presbyterians "U. S.," or to strike off the words "North" and "South" and make us all simply Presbyterians.

An appendix may serve some useful purpose, but seemingly it may be dispensed with with no very bad results. But so far the appendices on the Presbyterian Church bodies have not been removed, and when there is the least talk of it there are some in our own body who get very much wrought up and so pessimistic as to have the obituary of the appendixless Presbyterian "U. S." body already written; as was the case with a certain editor when a leading citizen was taken down with an attack of appendicitis, they rushed him off to the hospital and the local editor hearing the grave news, crowded into his last editorial a note that said: "Our esteemed fellow townsman will be operated upon to-morrow at St. Timothy's by Surgeon Cutter for appendicitis. He will leave a wife and five children."

But there are symptoms of unrest and uneasiness which go to indicate that the trouble is in the appendix, and something must be done. Both Assemblies sitting on the case have so recognized and diagnosed it. And while our Assembly in ses-

sion at Birmingham, in response to a resolution from the U. S. A. Church that it was ready to enter into negotiations with the Church U. S. with a view to organic union, took the ground that it "does not regard organic union as practicable at this time," yet it did appoint a committee of seven "in union with other Presbyterian bodies," and did recommend to the proposed conference the consideration of the federation of all the Presbyterian churches of our country upon some practical and effective basis. It is thus evident that there is among Presbyterian folk a well-nigh universal feeling that something should be done, something must be done indeed, to bring the Presbyterian bodies closer together on some effective working basis.

On this question as what is best to be done, and how to do it, there will doubtless be many opinions, ranging all the way from letting the matter rest and drop into never to be resurrected forgetfulness, to immediate and absolute organic union.

But, as we have seen, the question, like Banquo's ghost, will not down. It will be here to plague us until some other disposition is made of it. What disposition, therefore, shall we make of it? The writer can only express his own views, which, however, he knows to be the views of many of his brethren and some in his own Church and session, though there are doubtless many, even in his own congregation, who will not agree with him.

Let me say that I love my Church, in which all of my ministry of about twenty-five years has been spent, too much to want to see her torn and distracted by discordant views and worrying debates upon this subject, needlessly. And for that reason I could almost join in the cry, "Let us alone," "let well enough alone," "you 'tend to your work and we will 'tend to ours," each going his own way—if it were not that I am firmly convinced that the kingdom of God entrusted to us can be best served by another course. Let me say also that while I am a Southern man to the very core, having been born in the State of Georgia, son of a Confederate soldier, that for reasons not necessary to state here I took my theological course in

a seminary belonging to the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. And therefore I think I may look on both sides of the question as perhaps I could not if my preparation and training had all been in one section. By far the greater part of my ministry has been spent, too, in cities where there were churches U. S. A. and churches U. S., and with this experience I may say without beating about the bush that I am heartily and unreservedly in favor of Organic Union that shall make but one body of at least the two great Presbyterian bodies in the United States. I may briefly give my reasons therefor:

1. I see no reason for longer staying apart. I believe the Church South was right when it went into its separate existence. And if in organic union the same or a similar question should arise or principle be involved, in order to bear testimony to the spirituality of Christ's Church and Kingdom, I would vote for the Church to take the same action again. But I believe that as the occasion which brought about the separation has disappeared, even so have the acts on the part of the U. S. A. Church which resulted from the heat of the Civil War been apologized for both in Church papers and actions of higher Church courts, not only apologized for, but the position of the Church U. S. in that controversy has been recognized as the only tenable position, as it was, even at the time, by some of the great, cool heads of the Church North. And on all other administrative points which have held us apart the churches have, unconsciously it may be, drawn closer together until the differences in reality are but the semblance of a shadow. Indeed in the centralization of power in the hands of a committee I think we bid fair, a short time ago, to out Herod Herod. But aside from the fact that there seems nothing real and tangible to keep us apart, there seem many reasons why we should be together.

First. We have the same traditions and the same great history. We rejoice alike in the achievements of a stalwart Calvinism on the field of History. We like to boast of it as a political force shaping the form and destiny of many of the nations of the old world, and especially in their democratic spirit

and their republican tendencies, and always in the forefront in the battle for civil liberty. We are alike proud of the part this great system played in the formation of our own Republic, so that no less a historian than Ranke has said, "John Calvin was virtually the founder of America," meaning thereby that the men who were leaders in the founding of the new Republic had so imbibed his principles that they could have founded no other sort of Government save that which safeguarded the liberties of the people. We like to think of our common Calvinism as a great moral and spiritual force, with its free grace, its effectual calling, its final perseverance, and divine sovereignty; dethroning fear, exalting confidence and working in the mind the conviction that the interests committed to Christ are kept against all possibility of loss, and that man himself is immortal until his work is done. We alike believe in Calvinism as a great evangelizing force, and it is a note of interest that within the past few years the two Presbyterian bodies have been laying more stress upon the evangelizing arm of the Church than any of the other denominations. If the world ever needed the things for which Calvinism stood in the past and still stands in these respects, surely it needs them now. And there ought to be a united aggressive Church instead of a divided one, to impress these things with emphasis and force upon each fresh generation.

2. We have the same standards—the Westminster Confession of Faith, with the larger and shorter catechism and Book of Church Order. We go back alike to the chamber in the Westminster Abbey where from 1643 to 1647 the Westminster Assembly earnestly and reverently labored and prayed to produce a discipline and government as should be most agreeable to God's Holy Word, to bring the Church into conformity with the pattern shown in the Word, that the Church might hold the faith taught in the Word, govern itself according to the principles therein taught, and conduct its exercises of worship according to maxims derivable from the Word, believing in the sufficiency of the Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice to have the Church conform in all respects to

Scripture teaching. Its endeavor was to set forth, by the fullest freedom of debate, the Bible faith, polity and worship, each member of the Assembly pledging to maintain nothing but what he believed to be the truth in sincerity, when discovered unto him; that what any man would undertake to prove as necessary he should make good out of the Scriptures, the aim being to state nothing in these standards which is not expressly stated in the Word of God or derivable therefrom by good and necessary inference. In this way that Assembly produced not only the most logical and most complete, but the most Biblical and noblest creed ever yet produced in Christendom.

This Profession of Faith, with its Catechisms, was adopted by the old Synod of Philadelphia—the first Presbyterian Synod in North America—“as the confession of our faith,” which same Confession was, on the organization of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, adopted by it as its standards, and have remained so, virtually unchanged, until this time. Some of my brethren may say that this is just the trouble, that while our interpretation of the standards have remained unchanged, not so the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. But let us see: The union with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was in these words: “On the doctrinal basis of the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as revised in 1903, and of its other doctrinal and ecclesiastical standards; and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments shall be acknowledged as the inspired Word of God, the only unfallible rule of faith and practice.”

Turning to their Minutes of 1903 (p. 9-124) to see what the “revision of 1903” was, I do not believe there is any minister in our Church who could dissent from the items of that “Declaratory Statement.” The fact is that while there is an erratic Presbytery here and there in the Church North that has gone unspanked too long, yet the great rank and file of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., is as orthodox and Calvinistic as are we.

3. We have the same ideals of preaching—a sermon based

on the Word of God, applied to modern life, as the dominating thing about which the service shall center. Both are churches that honor the preaching of the Word as the means which God ordinarily uses for convicting sinners and building up His people. It would not be difficult for one to tell, even if he did not know, that he was in a Presbyterian Church when the sermon began, be he North or South. And though our brethren in the North may get a little more politics in their sermons than we in the South, and may, as some of us think, work Abraham Lincoln a little over time, yet on the whole they hew as closely to the Word of God and are as sound in their faith as are we.

4. We minister to the same kind of people—that strong, stalwart class of people, the best in any community, who are its business and spiritual backbone—it is these to whom the Presbyterian Church appeals and to whom it ministers. In the city where I have the honor of being pastor is a Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. With its pastor and his people I am on the most friendly and fraternal terms. They are the same kind of people that I find in my own Church, intermarried and interrelated. With the two churches of equal size and strength there would not be much to choose between in being pastor of them, and no doubt they could listen to either minister with equal profit.

It is from such a stream springing from the same source and flowing down through the years together in harmonious activity and fertility that our Church came, to divide through the upheaval of the Civil War, flowing for more than half a century now, with an embargoing isle between them, but having reached now at last its tapering end where the barrier has become well-nigh invisible and intangible save to one who wears gigantic magnifying lenses and has super-developed the touch of sensitiveness. And as in the strife of war they were rent asunder, so may not the stress of war bind them together once more. Surely this is no time for a divided Church. This is no time to accenuate differences, but to emphasize agreements. If we may have a lesson from the war, the weakness

of the allied cause, just though it may be, has been that of divided forces with no real unity, no directing head. To remedy this has been the recent effort of Lloyd George and others. While the strength of Germany's cause, unjust though it be, has been in the one directing mind to throw the forces where most needed. Conceive, if you can, that in addition to having an England and a France and an Italy and a Russia and the United States fighting almost as separate units, you should have also a divided England, France, Italy as the Russians are to-day—how incomparable weaker still would be the allied forces. Then conceive that if instead of having separately operating allies, each according to his own counsel and desire, there could have been a central directing power, the war would have been over ere this, and it will be hastened now just in proportion as the allies work together.

A few years ago we might have said that it was a blunder for the scattered fragments of the Church of Christ to be lacking in the highest possible spiritual efficiency. To-day it is a crime. The world's dire need is summoning all the members of the body of Christ to remember that they are one body in Christ and to act together in a finer concert of power. It has been well said that Protestantism is not to-day the mighty cable it was meant to be binding the free nations to the throne of God. It has been frayed out into so many strands that no single thread or group of threads has in it the necessary fiber for the strain we would impose upon it. We are not in our several communities or in the nation as a whole in a position to furnish that competent and impressive moral leadership which the complex life of this modern world so sorely demands. It would seem bad enough to have so many different denominations, and yet I am not pleading for the obliterating of denominational lines. But it does seem that denominations which have so much in common and absolutely nothing much worth the mentioning to separate them, should be together. Brethren, let us put away this shame of a divided household, and let us who are really brothers and sisters in blood kin in

all essentials get together, the one household in name as well as in spirit.

But some one will be saying, cannot this be done under some form of federation with more harmony perhaps and just as much effectiveness as by organic union? Not to my mind. There will still be division, overlapping, two bodies working where one could do it with less expense and moiling. It would still look as if we were just a little afraid to trust one another.

As to the practical method of working this union, I would not favor the provincial assembly or assemblies so much as the giving the respective Synods their popular place in the Presbyterian scheme of things, endowing them, if needs be, with a little more power and making them the basis of representation to the General Assembly of the whole united Church.

Brethren, it ought to come. It is going to come. Please God it may come soon.