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Church Union and a Greater Canada

By The Rev. Charles G. Peterson, D.D., Winnipeg.

TO the enemy and to ourselves the war has revealed a united Canada. In the trenches across the ocean men from all parts of every province of our Dominion stand side by side, while here at home loving hearts and busy brains and hands are joined to keep them there and to send them reinforcements. A cross section of our national life from sea to sea would show that underneath the particular differences which emerge like the peaks of a mountain range there lies a solid substructure of conviction and purpose that gives unity to it all. Undoubtedly there is a real Canadian consciousness—a distinct national spirit, an indivisible union of British subjects within our borders. To meet the problems which are fast approaching us from out the mysterious future we go forward as a Canadian commonwealth, which in its constituent parts may be separate as the fingers, but in its totality is one as the hand.



CHARLES G. PETERSON, D.D.

Something even more important is now clearly recognized by the thoughtful observer. The war has demonstrated the existence throughout Canada of vast reserves of powers of righteousness and love and has proved that they can be summoned and marshaled on behalf of an enterprise that kindles the imagination, grips the heart, and rouses the determination of the people. There is evidently an enlightened and sensitive public moral consciousness which is of greater value to our country than all the wealth with which the Creator has stored its land and water. Only too numerous and obvious, if it is true, are the instances of unscrupulous and treacherous conduct which recently have been brought to light through our courts and commissions. But the very thoroughness with which all such proceedings have been conducted and their agents repudiated, and the universal and insistent demand for radical action in other cases of a like nature, gives ground for the conviction that the old virtues of truth and honor are securely entrenched in our midst. And more particularly may be noted the extraordinary display during the war of that mutual kindness which underlies all higher phases of social evolution, and is essential to national fitness. The shock of combat with our cruel and mighty foe has released a flood of sympathy and good will that has cleansed and fertilized our land and prepared the soil for rich harvests in the days to come.

Naturally, therefore, we are looking for a greater Canada henceforth: not as regards territory, nor primarily in growth of population, nor in increase of material development, but greater in quality of spirit and expression of life. And we are sure that such a hope will be abundantly realized, provided that those ethical powers and this moral passion be conserved and augmented, and enlisted for national progress after the war. Especially must this "fusing kindness" now so much in evidence, become even more general and active; for the strain and irritation of the readjusting process when normal times return will be severe and dangerous. Many of the forces now working together for the winning of the war will afterward become again antagonistic and divisive, and there will be an imperative need for that kindness and forbearance which are indispensable to national unification in thought and action. Our genuine social upbuilders will be those who strive with energy to bring Canadians together in larger bodies of mutual consideration and good-will, and so extend the reach and increase the effectiveness of kindly feeling. And any proposal merits our cordial support

which will promote closer fusion of minds and more mingling of emotions with fellowship, aiding in the welding of an entire people into a moral unity.

On such proposal is that which would merge the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian Churches into the United Church of Canada. No one would pretend that this union of churches would furnish the key to millennial conditions. A change in ecclesiastical organization, on however large a scale, could not insure a higher type of national character and life. But such action taken by more than half a million of our adult citizens would have a very great effect for good upon themselves as Canadians, and would make it easier for other union movements to come to maturity. The tendency to-day is toward greater simplicity and flexibility of structure in every province of life, and toward united emphasis upon the essentials held in common in every department of thought and belief. Let this trend of sentiment and conviction find expression in the calling into existence of one great Church to take the place of three lesser bodies, and it will be seen that sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of all its parts.

Should these hundreds of thousands of our church members take this step, they would in so doing lay upon the altar of true patriotism the sacrifice of inherited customs, tender associations, deep-rooted preferences and cherished opinions. Such a sacrifice would be costly and hard to make; but the reaction upon those who offered it would be most wholesome. In losing their denominational life for the sake of others they would find a larger and more worthy life of usefulness and power. They would give to the nation also a manifestation of good-will in action that would greatly facilitate the increase of friendship and the growth of kindness. The scientific discoveries of last century have made the world a neighborhood; the religious spirit of this century must make it a brotherhood.

One of the first requisites in the subordination of organization to life, and willingness to give up what is not essential so that the institution may render the largest possible service to the people for whom it exists. This is what Church Union would involve: a Christian spirit and religious life of Canada would be purified and ennobled by this display of genuine magnanimity and downright moral earnestness. For a greater Canada we need a greater Church.

AS CENTRE



NATIONS are built in the public schools. The ideals set up by the school teacher remain very largely the ideals of the pupil throughout life, and his conception of patriotism will be what he has been taught during his school years. It is not too much to say that the present world war is due to a difference of ideals fostered by different systems of education.

Great as is the importance of the public school in old and well-established countries, this importance is even greater in the new lands which are being called upon to assimilate populations from the more congested countries. It is worthy of note that in Western Canada, which may be cited as a case in point of a country which is called upon to assimilate a population of many races. Some of the most strenuous political and constitutional fights have hinged upon the systems of public education. These fights, however, were not without their purpose, and it is out of them has arisen a public school policy well calculated to meet the needs of a new and rapidly growing country. In such a country the public school has to take on functions not usually associated with it in the older and more settled schoolhouse is not merely a centre of education; it is also the religious and social centre of the district. During the week days the school teacher furnishes education to the children of the neighborhood, but on Sunday the missionary holds his services, which all attend regardless of creed or nationality, and on week nights the building is used for meetings of farmers, for the various community societies; for the Red Cross or Patriotic Club, and for purely social events such as debates, concerts and dances. To facilitate the latter, it may be noted that many country schoolhouses use removable desks which the willing hands of the farmers' boys quickly dispose of whenever there is a dance in prospect.

Another phase of community work associated with the rural school which has been coming into prominence during the last few years is the supply of books to settlers in the district. This work is encouraged and assisted by the central Department of Education, which provides catalogues of books suitable for such purposes, the actual selection being left to the teacher. The number of books allotted to a school district is based on the report of the inspector of schools. In the Province of Alberta, although in its infancy, no less than 110,000 books were supplied for this purpose last year, at a cost of some \$30,000.00. Educationists of the province look forward to the time when every school district will be a library centre, giving to the settlers the facilities now afforded to residents of cities and towns through their public libraries. The prosperity which has almost overwhelmed rural Alberta in the last two years, when farmers have been reaping enormous crops and selling them at the highest figures in history, promises to contribute still further to the importance of the rural school as a social centre. With every farmer driving his own automobile the opportunities for social gatherings are greatly increased, and the country school is the natural meeting place.

WHY NOT?
An Appeal to the Opponents of Union

By the Rev. HUGH PEURLEY, D.D., of Montreal

FOR over fourteen years the question of the fusion of the Protestant Churches to form a United Church of Canada has been a subject of earnest and practical discussion. During that time a Joint Conference of over one hundred men have been at work with a view to discovering a comprehensive and practical basis of union. They have met with unexpected success. The basis of Union fully framed represents practical unanimity on the part of the framers. This is a very significant and important fact.



REV. HUGH PEURLEY, D.D.

But an opposition has sprung up in one of the churches—the Presbyterian—whose object, boldly avowed, is to frustrate this endeavor after union. It is much easier to explain this opposition than it is to justify it. But it should be justified and by the men involved. What the logicians call the burden of proof lies with them. The question is not "Why have they broken forth or a nest of snakes to be hatched?"

The second is that the mature judgment of the world is behind the principle that strength lies in unity. "United we stand, divided we fall," is a maxim that has its roots striking deep into generations of experience. The third is that negotiations have involved patient labor and large expenditure and at two pivotal points their determining impulse from Presbyterian leaders. Principal Peurley of Winnipeg, whose words have been impartially of a newly-arrived but well-disciplined mind, and Principal Gaven of Toronto, whose experience had the weight of a life-long experience in Canada. They assume no heavy responsibility who seek to render futile all this mass of thought, effort and prayer.

In the fourth place there is a very serious practical problem involved. That problem was inadvertently introduced by one of the architects at a recent meeting of the anti-union party in Montreal. He was referring to the next General Assembly, which is to meet in Montreal, and he parenthetically exclaimed, "Thank God not in Winnipeg!" And why "Thank God not in Winnipeg?" Because and this is the significant thing, the West is in favor of this Union, and the Anti-Union men feel that their cause is a lost cause on the other side of the Great Lakes.

What is the condition of things out there? A vast and thinly settled country; three great trunk lines of railway, each of which is like a necklace on which beads of various sizes are threaded, each bead a collection of human beings; communities that they are brought together are driven to emphasize a type of life in which conditions count for little and practical values count for much. This is

what you find in the West. Now, this people in the West are not getting the question, "Why should we not worship together?" We need God out here—the universal Father—we need Jesus Christ, the friend and helper of struggling folk. We need all the help and fellowship we can get in shaping this new life that which is high and noble. Why not get together? Why not worship together? What have the opponents to say to that? They say to these people, you can do it in a certain way and on a limited scale. They say that you may do it in one place by the Methodists becoming Presbyterians and in the other place by Presbyterians becoming Methodists. But the men of the West say "Why have this partial and ineffective method? Why not unite in every community? Why not find what the Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists have in common, and worship and work on that basis? Why not? And they have a right, a right you may be sure they will exercise to the full, to say to the opponents, "Why not? and to demand a satisfactory answer."

In the fifth place the proposal to unite has awakened interest that goes beyond the three negotiating bodies. I am quite convinced that the thinking Christian public of Canada, both Protestant and Catholic, are watching for the outcome of this endeavor after unity. I know that in Britain, in the United States and in far-away Dominions and foreign lands there are expectant eyes turned in this direction. We have gone a good part of the way towards the consummation; why not get the rest of the way. Why not let Canada have the joy and the honor of opening up a new chapter in the history of the church? Why not? This is a serious question and I hope those who up to the present have been opposing union will appreciate its significance.

I have nothing to do with the motives which have led men to oppose this union. It would be impertinent and uncharitable to call them in question. But I do say that in view of the considerations advanced, the opponents are assuming an enormous responsibility, and must be prepared to give this question, "Why not?" a very weighty and great answer.

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