

A NEW AND IMPORTANT MOVEMENT
FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES. –
PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE ON CHURCH UNITY.

The following was written to the Cincinnati *Commercial Gazette* by a gentleman present at the meeting described.

"It is not generally known, yet nevertheless one of the most important religious movements of the century is now taking definite shape, through the work of committees appointed by the different evangelical churches of the United States. The movement is in the direction of church unity, or, at least, federal union of evangelical bodies. The committee of the Presbyterian Church convened at the Executive Mansion in Harrisburg, Pa., on Tuesday evening at 8 o'clock, continuing through Wednesday. There were present Rev. Drs. Joseph T. Smith, of Baltimore; R. M. Patterson, of Philadelphia; D. C. Marquis, of Chicago McCormick Theological Seminary; W. H. Green, of Princeton Theological Seminary; W. H. Roberts, of Lane Theological Seminary, Cincinnati; Francis Brown, of Union Theological Seminary, New York; Hon. James A. Beaver, Governor of Pennsylvania; Hon. Cyrus L. Pershing, of Johnstown, Pa.; Judge Robert N. Wilson, of Philadelphia; Hon. W. E. Dodge, of New York, and E. R. Monfort, of Cincinnati.

"The committee were royally entertained by Governor and Mrs. Beaver at the Executive Mansion. This committee have had under consideration for over two years the questions raised in the declaration of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church addressed to the Protestant denominations of the country in which they set forth: –

"1. Their earnest desire for the closer union of all Christians in the sense of the Savior's prayer that 'we all may be one.'

"2. Their belief that all who have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are members of the Holy Catholic Church.

"3. That in all things of human ordering relating to modes of worship and discipline or to traditional customs this Church is ready, in the spirit of love and humility, to forego preferences of her own.

"These principles which the Episcopal Church regards as essential to restoration of unity among divided branches are as follows: –

"1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as revealed in the Word of God.

"2. The Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of Christian faith.

"3. The two Sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper, are administered with unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.

"4. The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the method of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church.

"To carry out the declaration of which the above is an abstract, a commission was appointed, consisting of Rt. Revs. Alfred Lee, D.D., LL.D., Bishop of Delaware; John Williams, LL.D., Bishop of Connecticut; Richard H. Wilmer, D.D., LL.D., Bishop of Alabama; Abram Newkirk Littlejohn, D.D., LL.D., Bishop of Long Island; Mark Antony De Wolfe, D.D., LL.D.,

Bishop of Central Pennsylvania, with five distinguished ministers and five laymen.

"The Presbyterian General Assembly met these advances towards practical unity with cordial sympathy and a desire for co-operation in Christian work, and directed the following reply to be made: – *"To the Commission of Conference on Church Unity of the House of Bishops and of the House of Deputies of the Protestant Episcopal Church: –*

"DEAR BRETHREN: – The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America...have received with sincere gratification the 'declaration' of your House of Bishops, and your request under it for a brotherly conference with us and with other branches of the Church of Christ, 'seeking the restoration of the organic unity of the Church of Christ, with a view to the earnest study of the conditions under which so priceless a blessing might happily be brought to pass.' The General Assembly are in cordial sympathy with the growing desire among the Evangelical Christian Churches for practical unity and co-operation in the work of spreading the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout all the earth. They respond to your invitation with the sincere desire that the conference asked for may lead, if not to a formal oneness of organization, yet to such a vital and essential unity of faith and spirit and co-operation as will bring all the followers of our common Lord into hearty fellowship and mutual recognition and reciprocity as members of one visible Church of Christ, and workers together with Him in advancing his kingdom on earth.

"Without discussing the principles set forth by the House of Bishops, this letter announces the appointment of a committee to confer with such commission and any similar commissions or committees appointed by any of the Christian Churches for conference on the subject.

"The committee have held several meetings and conferences with closed doors, and thus far the result of their deliberations has not been given to the public, and will not until their is mutual consent. The correspondence, when published, will create a decided sensation, and be at the same time a source of great gratification to those who desire the restoration of unity among the divided branches of Christendom. As may be readily seen, their is substantial agreement now upon the first three articles, viz.: The Scriptures, the Sacraments and the Nicene creed; and as to the fourth there has been a most sincere and generous Christian spirit – and I may say desire – upon the part of the [R1198 : page 6] Episcopal Bishops to come nearer to the Presbyterian Church and bring the Church nearer to them, and find some basis, if not of organic union, of federal union and co-operation. Dr. John De Witt, of Chicago, not a member of the committee, furnished some articles for The Churchman, in which he clearly set forth to the satisfaction of many Episcopal readers that 'reciprocity would not contravene any principle of Protestant Episcopacy,' and we suppose that the facts set forth by him are substantially those that influence the Bishops in their opinion that there are no serious obstacles in their way to the recognition of the Presbyterian and other Protestant ministry, and *vice versa*.

"The Presbyterian General Assembly at a late session made the following catholic and rational statement of what it considers the grounds upon which 'practical Church unity can be realized and maintained:'

"1. All believers in Christ constitute one body, mystical, yet real, destined to grow into the fulness of Him who filleth all in all.

"2. The universal visible Church consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children.

"3. Mutual recognition and reciprocity between the different bodies that profess the true religion is the first and essential step towards practical Church unity.'

"It is manifest that the spirit of federal or co-operative unity has taken deep root in the minds and hearts of the leaders of evangelical bodies, and that the time is not far distant when co-operation and comity, if not more, of all or nearly all evangelical bodies will be realized. The correspondence with the Commission of the Congregational Churches has strengthened this belief, and after a lengthy discussion of a paper by Dr. Patterson, of Philadelphia, on 'The Federation of Evangelical Churches,' the committee unanimously agreed to recommend the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to express its approval of the idea of federation of Evangelical Churches, and invite the evangelical Churches, of the United States to enter into a federal union. Such a federation will not require any sacrifice of doctrinal belief nor the granting of authority by evangelical bodies that would require constitutional changes nor an abandonment of historic beliefs. In the Episcopal Church, for instance, there is no real reason for denying the ordination of other Protestant ministry. Their view of the episcopate involving three orders of the ministry is not held as a dogma or Article of Faith binding on the conscience, for their Standards do not make it such, but merely as a historical fact accepted in their Church, but open to investigation and revision, and so furnishing no obstacle to recognition, co-operation or federation.

"The Federation proposed has not been clearly outlined, but it will be formulated by a Convention composed of delegates from all evangelical bodies who enter into it, and will have limited powers delegated consistent with the constitutions of existing bodies. It will not be an Evangelical Alliance with only advisory powers, but a Federal Alliance for combining general powers and promoting harmony, removing causes of friction, establishing

comity and *uniting* AGAINST THE GREAT ENEMIES of Christianity and progress, and in all possible ways lifting up the standard of the Cross and keeping it unfurled over the allied armies of the King of kings and Lord of lords, that the establishment of His kingdom may be hastened and the world emancipated from the damnation of sin."

– E. R. MONFORT.
HARRISBURG, PA.

The fact that the gentlemen engaged in this federation or union of the various sects into one (much as the several states are federated in the one government of the United States) have no intention of doing evil, but quite the contrary – to do good – is no guarantee that the work when done will not prove to be an evil, and a stupendous one, as the Scriptures clearly show.

Old readers of the TOWER will remember that nine years ago we pointed out from the Book of Revelation that such a union would take place; and that then and thus Protestantism would become the peer and fellow of Roman Catholicism, and that the two great bodies would co-operate in the great work of strangling every advance in thought on religious subjects. Thus Protestants are making of themselves a system which when perfected will be a veritable likeness or image of the Papal system. We say *making* because the work of construction began in 1846 in the organization of the Evangelical Alliance. It will reach a still further development in the proposed Evangelical Federation or Union. And it will receive life or vitality as a system and feel its *authority* later, when it shall accept from the Episcopalians the doctrine of apostolic succession and the laying on of hands. It will then claim that only such as have these holy (?) hands and the authority (?) thus given to teach have any right to teach on religious subjects. And finally it will, figuratively speaking,

behead all who will not bow to its dictum; and such shall neither buy nor sell (communicate, trade in the Truth) any more.

Then the Word of God will be relegated to a back seat, as it was during the dark ages, when Papacy claimed to be the only church and that her decrees were to be received and obeyed as God's Word instead of the Bible, whose day, it was claimed, had passed by. This will be attempted again by the Evangelical Union and the Roman Catholics with some success. But it shall not succeed as before, for general intelligence and the spirit of liberty will not admit their claims nor permit the carrying out of the project. General infidelity among the masses will pave the way for socialism and finally for anarchy, which as the fire of the great day of God Almighty shall sweep all before it into the greatest time of trouble the world has ever known (Dan. 12:1), overthrowing all sects and isms and giant systems and the governments associated with them.

The formation of such a federation as is projected means a fourfold political influence. It means the formulation of laws upon religion. At first these will be conservative, touching and attempting to curb only the grosser immoralities; but each success will embolden and finally bring the mailed hand of power to the throat of individual liberty – gradually curtailing and strangling freedom of speech upon religion as well as upon politics. This at first will be by laws regulating the observance of Sunday – compelling abstinence from business on that day.

Our friends, the Seventh Day Adventists, affect to see in such a law a terrible blow at them and against their liberty of conscience to worship God according to their ideas of the teachings of his Word. But they are deceiving themselves. Such a law would not interfere at all with their observance of Saturday (the day which they, thinking themselves under the Law given to Israel, feel bound to observe, and on which they abstain from labor). Should

such a law pass, as we have no doubt it will, it will interfere with no man's conscience, as each may observe as many and which ever days he pleases *in addition* to Sunday. The Seventh Day Adventists, in crying out that such a Sunday law would be a great crime against their liberty of conscience, evidently delude themselves. Surely they will not claim that God commanded them to *do labor on Sunday*. And, this being true, they should have no *conscientious* scruples against resting from labor on Sunday if the majority of their fellow-citizens insist upon it. We surely see no good objection to such a law as a movement for rest from labor, though we believe it unwise from a religious standpoint to try to legislate faith or worship to any degree.

We merely point out the fact that such *harmless* legislation will prove an entering wedge for other not so harmless. For if the right of the *majority* to decide upon such questions be admitted at all, it will be easy to carry the principle further and decide what God shall [R1198 : page 7] be worshipped on that day and what one belief shall be held and taught, and to tax all for the support of that one system of belief.

Already we have an intimation of how the matter may be expected to work. In Chicago after the haymarket riots, etc., certain police orders were given with a view to the suppression of Anarchistic meetings for the promulgation of their wild theories, as against the interests of the public welfare. Thereupon the Anarchists organized their meetings and held them on Sundays and called them Anarchist Sunday Schools; and there being no laws against Sunday Schools the police have been baffled and the Chief of Police of Chicago is credited with the remark that the law must stipulate what shall be recognized as a Sunday School. The next step evidently would be to limit and define what are Christian doctrines and what are heresies. And it requires no great stretch of imagination to see that when the Evangelical Federation or Union has been formed and its creed defined that creed will gradually

come to be recognized as the *standard* of orthodoxy; and then any out of harmony with such majority will have very limited rights and privileges indeed. It is not only possible but highly probable that not only Anarchists and the Seventh Day Adventists and ourselves, but others of God's children more or less free from sectarianism and its hoary errors will be hindered in the spread of the truth – strangled. And it will not at all surprise us if this condition of things may come to pass by the year 1900 – or sooner. To all of the dear fellow-laborers in the harvest work we say then, fervently, Labor on faint not; "Labor while it is called day for a night cometh wherein no man *can* work."
