

SPLITTING THINGS FINE.

A contemporary, *The Christian*, says: – "SOME one, speaking of the different classes of Presbyterians, describes them as the 'U.Ps,' 'R.Ps' and '*split* Ps.' The United States Census Bulletin shows how sectarianism runs to seed in America. In the United States there are about *a hundred and forty different religious denominations*. Among Presbyterians there are, 'The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America,' and 'The Presbyterian Church in the United States,' and four branches of 'Reformed Presbyterians,' and half a score of other brands of Presbyterians. There are four bodies calling themselves 'Brethren,' which are noted as I, II, III, IV. There is 'The Reformed Church of America,' and 'The Reformed Churches in the United States.' There are some twenty kinds of Methodists, and a number of kinds of Baptists, among which are mentioned, the 'Six-Principle Baptists,' the 'River Brethren,' the 'Primitive,' the 'Free-Will,' the 'Original Free-Will,' the 'General' and the 'General Free-Will Baptists;' to say nothing of the 'Self-Will Baptists' of which the colored brother spoke. Among the Societies of the 'Friends' are the 'Orthodox,' the 'Hicksite,' the 'Wilburite' and the 'Primitive.' The Lutherans have seventeen or eighteen distinct organizations. The Mennonites, with 41,000 communicants, have a dozen different branches. The people who specially claim to be looking for the Lord, and who have adopted the name 'Adventists,' are divided into half a dozen sects, each with their denominational organizations; and so men divide until it almost seems as if they would divide a man before they are done....

"Said Dr. Philip Schaff, speaking on this subject, 'By persecuting, abusing, and excommunicating each other, the churches do cruel injustice to their common Lord and his followers. They contract his Kingdom and his power. They lower in form his kingly throne to the headship of a party or school. They hate those whom he loves and for

whom he died; they curse those whom he blesses, they violate the fundamental law of his gospel.'

"One result of this state of things is, that many devout men are unattached to any of these denominations. They love the Lord, and, like the Psalmist, desire to be companions of 'all them that fear God;' but they cannot tie themselves or bind themselves to any single sect or body of people, nor are they ready to accept the creeds and confessions which are, in many cases, imposed as prerequisites to membership in these denominations. Nor are they willing to bear the unscriptural and sectarian names which have been imposed upon the Christians, either as the nick-names of scoffing enemies, or the sectarian badges of men who aspire to leadership, and desire to impose their label upon their followers as the marks by which they know *their* sheep, as distinguished from the tokens by which the Lord knows his.

"Among the men who have given expression to this dislike of the denominationalism of the day, may be mentioned Abraham Lincoln who, though in former years skeptical, during his presidential career gave evidence of faith in God and a devout desire to serve him, but still remained unconnected with any denomination. To H. C. Deming, of Connecticut, he said: –

"'When any church will inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership, the Savior's condensed statement of the substance of both law and gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' *that church will I join with all my heart and all my soul.*'"

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But often even those who seem to see that something is wrong with nominal "churchianity," fail to see in what the real wrong consists, and what is the true remedy.

Was it wrong for Protestants to secede from Roman Catholicism?
No!

Was it wrong for John Wesley's followers to secede from the Protestant Episcopal Church, when they conscientiously believed that they were moving in the right direction? No!

Is it wrong for any man or company of men to obey conscientiously their understanding of the teaching of God's Word and the leading of his providence, – even if it make ten thousand splits? Certainly not!

How then can we harmonize these rights and duties of men to split up, with the central thought of the unity of the Church as expressed in our Redeemer's prayer, when he said, "I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me – *that they all may be one*, even as thou Father and I are one?"

We answer, that our Lord had no reference to any earthly organization, sect or denomination. He referred to the true Church, whose names are written in heaven; and his words cannot properly be applied to any other.

So far as the splitting up is concerned, we may surprise some by declaring that in our view it has not gone far enough. Each split represented a conflict [R2066 : page 275] between truth and error; and the error, darkness and ignorance of Papacy's *enforced* "union" of the eighth to the fifteenth centuries was so dense as to require all the splitting and reforming that has followed the breaking of its power, and more too; for the work of reform still lacks much of completion. We hope and labor that the good work of reforming and protesting against errors may go on and on, until *each* individual Christian will rest his faith (not in a denomination, large or small) but *personally* and *individually* in the Redeemer, and be united to Christ Jesus, the Head, as a member of his body – the only true Church.

For the past five centuries the Truth (strangled and bound hand and foot and buried by Antichrist in [R2066 : page 276] false creeds and systems) has been gradually awaking and struggling, and with some success, to get back to the light and life and liberty wherewith the true Christ made it free. Yet friends as well as foes have fought against this proper effort persistently; denouncing every reformer and liberty-lover, complimenting all who oppose reform, and tying on new "union" bandages as rapidly as possible.

As the good work of getting free from the fetters of human bondage and error progresses, it is like taking the outer shells off of a nut and getting at the meat, the kernel, the valuable part, which is of very different shape and substance from the original outward appearance. So the cracking and splitting up of the Papal system not only threw off an outer repulsive system of superstition and immorality but cracked the inner shell of unscriptural sectarian bondage in error; and the cracking and picking operation must progress, as it has progressed, until every atom of the real meat of the nut is freed from the shell.

Stripped of the outer shells we now see that the *true Church* is not composed of two hundred millions of professors, but instead is a "little flock" of fully consecrated believers, among whom are not many great or wise or noble or rich according to the estimate of this world. And we find the faith of this true Church as different from that of the mass as its numbers are different. It has three steps to which none of the true Church can object, – (1) Justification through faith in the precious blood of Christ; (2) Consecration in thought, word and deed to God and his cause as best they understand; (3) Growth in grace, knowledge and love.

Standing thus free, untrammelled by human creeds and bondages, but personally united to Christ, each will find in the others "members of the body of Christ," and affinity, fellowship and love will unite them in the *only* "union" that is not injurious; – union in Christ, to whom, as living "branches" in the Vine, each is personally united.

But such liberty will not mean anarchy and disorder; for the wisdom that cometh from above which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits," no less than the words and example of our Lord through his apostles, will instruct them as to a propriety of order in their assemblies, for the benefit of all. (See our issue of Nov. 15, 1895, "Let All Things Be Done Decently and in Order.")

The *physical* union of the Church, the entire body of Christ, will be in glory, – at the completion of the First Resurrection; for "we ourselves also groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption; to wit, the redemption [deliverance] of *our body*," – the body of Christ. – Rom. 8:23.

Meantime let this "splitting things fine" continue; and let each individual Christian seek to be no longer a babe in Christian experience and knowledge but to attain the stature of manhood in Christ. (Eph. 4:13-15.) Too long has assent to human creeds taken the place of individual faith! Too long has membership in a popular or an unpopular denomination satisfied the conscience and taken the place of a personal covenant and union with the Redeemer. Too long have many lords, many faiths and many baptisms taken the place of the one Lord, one faith and one baptism, once delivered to the saints.

Such a splitting up of creeds and systems has been necessary to set free the Lord's "sheep," to prepare a cleansed sanctuary class truly united in Christ. – See MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. III., chapter 4.
