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## **THE GATHERING OF THE CHURCHES**

– *BY EUGENE WOOD* –

WE QUOTE the following from the columns of Everybody's Magazine, not by way of endorsing it, but because it gives a fairly good view of the way the "worldly wise" look at matters; and in order to the better point out the writer's erroneous view. Introducing the article the editor of Everybody's says;

"We asked Eugene Wood, whose frank article on consumption set people thinking intelligently about the white plague, to attend the two religious conferences organized to discuss the unification of the churches, and to report what he saw and heard. This is his report. It is presented exactly for what it is – the individual impressions and thoughts of a plain-spoken man, who is himself a believer, but who takes the ground that Christianity is greater than dogma and more important than its sects. We submit this article to you, our readers, not as a contribution to theological controversy, for that has no place here, but in the sincere belief that a little "talking out in meeting" now and then will help the Christianity most of us profess, and aid morality and virtue. There are many new things in the world to-day. Thought is a living and growing thing. Modern scientific investigation has lightened up dark places in the annals of the race and we are all looking at life through different peep-holes from those through which our grandfathers viewed the eternal problem. Knowing more of the beginnings of religion than our ancestors, and realizing as we must that other men in other lands are thinking about the selfsame problems that are our concern, it is impossible not to believe that the God our forefathers regarded as a private possession of their particular sect is the God of the Chinese and the Hindus and the Mohammedans, as well as of us Americans and Europeans. As our outlook widens, we begin to

see that the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount is of higher consequence than the Apostles' Creed, and that though forms may differ, most honest men, be they Buddhists or Confucians, Protestants or Roman Catholics, are struggling toward the same goal, looking up at the same stars, praying to the same God and for much the same things."

The writer, Eugene Wood, takes as his text the words of Prof. Goldwin Smith, and begins: "*This anxious gathering of the churches shows that they believe a religious crisis to be at hand. It is also a social crisis.*"

Two extremely significant, not to say portentous, conferences, with apparently the same underlying purpose, were held in November last on nearly coincident dates, the New York State Conference of Religion at Rochester, 13th-14th, and the Inter-Church Conference on Federation, in Carnegie Hall, New York City, 15th-21st.

To say that the underlying purpose of both conferences was to further the unity (either after the flesh or after the spirit) of the many dissident religious bodies will not be vividly interesting to the public at large. It might have been fifty years ago, when there wasn't much else to talk about, but being absorbed in weightier matters than differences of opinion as to the orthodox way to sharpen a lead pencil, or whether wetting the top of a man's head is more efficacious than having the water run out of his shoe-tops, the public has long ago dismissed the subject as impracticable and [R3873 : page 325] unprofitable. It is perhaps a little late in the day to query: Why separate organizations for the Reformed Church in America and the Reformed Church in the United States of America? Why a Presbyterian Church, and a Reformed Presbyterian Church, and a United Presbyterian Church, and a Welsh Presbyterian Church, and a Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and so on, to the end of the chapter? Why

the colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America, and an African Methodist Episcopal Church, and an African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church? There is a Methodist Episcopal Church and a Methodist Episcopal Church South (and, I am told, some Methodist Episcopal churches in Baltimore that are neither one nor the other, but kind of betwixt and between), between whom there is no difference in doctrine or polity, but only a soreheaded poutiness about a quarrel fifty years old, settled forever by the rude arbitrament of war, as to whether the negro was ordained of God to work only for his board and keep, or for wages that will just about pay for his board and keep, if he is lucky in getting jobs and careful with his money.

Conferences to make up the clothes-line fusses between Mrs. Cassidy and Mrs. Ryan would possess about the same interest for the general public, were it not for the notable fact that it sometimes happens that more comes out of the bag than was put into it. This is my only excuse for blackening good white paper to tell you what happened in Rochester and in Carnegie Hall on the dates I have given.

### **THE PLAN OF FEDERATION**

Not by way of reporting so much as by way of refreshing your recollection, I will say that the Inter-Church Conference on Federation adopted a Plan. Delegates from some thirty evangelical bodies voted for it, and the legislative assemblies of these thirty religious bodies will ratify the Plan in due season, provided it doesn't prevent their sharpening their lead-pencils their own orthodox way. Then they will elect members of the Federal Council, four for each denomination, and one in addition for each 50,000 communicants. This Federal Council will meet for business in December, 1908, and once every four years thereafter. So there won't anything be done precipitately; we can rest easy as to that. "The Federal Council shall have no authority

over the constituent bodies adhering to it; but its province shall be limited to the expression of its counsel, and the recommending of a course of action in matters of common interest to the churches, local councils, and individual Christians. It has no authority to draw up a common creed, or form of government or worship, or in any way to limit the full autonomy of the Christian bodies adhering to it." So we need not fear drastic action; we may rest easy as to *that*.

To the objection that this seems a rather tenuous bond of union one may say that mighty empires have been formed of States whose first coming together was quite as – er – quite as – well, "cage-y." To speak of "Christian bodies adhering" to such a confederacy seems rather a brilliant metaphor than a precise statement, but we shall see – what we shall see. It's all over until 1908, anyhow. \*\*\*

## **MANY SECTS – ONE RELIGION**

Membership in the Inter-Church Conference on Federation was representative. The delegates went there and voted, not as they thought as individuals, but as they thought their denominations thought, which is the same as what the most unprogressive of their denominations thought, the Uncle Billy Hardheads [R3874 : page 325] with ear-trumpets up there in the front seats. The fact that membership in the New York State Conference of Religion was individual, and that a man went there to represent himself, made all the difference in the world between the two conferences. At Rochester they didn't formulate a plan. I think all the voting that was done was on whether they should thank the city of Rochester for its hospitality, and whether they should accept the kind invitation to go to Schenectady the next time. Clergymen and laymen from the dissident bodies, Christian and Jewish, were present and spoke. The motto of this conference was "Religions are many; religion is one," and the

effort was not so much to arrive at corporal union; not so much to constitute a council which should have no authority to do more than say that it looks like rain but may clear up after all, as to declare that spiritual kinship subsists of itself and without formulated effort – kinship not only between the Reformed Church in America and the Reformed Church in the United States of America; between evangelicals and the misguided but well-meaning creatures who think there is no hell; but also between Catholics and Protestants, between Christians and Jews – nay, more, between those whose heritage is the Bible, and Mohammedans, Buddhists, Jains, Parsees, Confucianists, Shintoists, Brahmins, even those who "in their blindness bow down to wood and stone.

### **GOD IN IDEAL OR IDOL**

There were none of these latter present, but they would have been welcomed if they had come, for at this conference it was seen that whether a man forms a god with his hands and it is called an idol, or forms one with his mind and it is called an ideal, the Father of us all, in whom we live and move and have our being, knows how it is with us: how we grope in the darkness that is about us if haply we may find him. And the homage we pay to his broken reflection in idol or ideal he takes unto himself as he spake by the mouth of his prophet Malachi, saying, "In every place incense is offered unto my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the heathen, saith the Lord of Hosts."

[This the Revised Version of Malachi 1:11, is not in our judgment correct. The Common Version reads: *shall be* instead of *is*, and thus agrees with facts and other Scriptures. See I Cor. 10:20. – Editor Z.W.T.]

## ROMAN CATHOLIC APPROVAL

The air at this Rochester Conference was clearer, freer of the smoke of Smithfield and Geneva. Said one good soul: "It is of more importance that I shall understand your position than that you shall understand mine." You couldn't jaw with that man because he doesn't sharpen a lead-pencil the way you do. As a result of that spirit at Rochester, Jews learned that Christians, for all their insistence upon the Three Persons in the Godhead, can say with them the Sh'ma Israel, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is One," and Christians learned from Jews that Jesus was a typical Jew, and that what divides the creeds is not [R3874 : page 326] his teachings, but concessions made to heathen Europe afterward.

It is matter for regret that at Rochester and at Carnegie Hall there was no representation of either the Roman Catholic Church, whose membership is estimated at about one-eighth of the entire population of the country (certainly one-third of the entire population of New York City is Roman Catholic), or of that unorganized but perhaps even larger body known as the Big Church, whose members loaf around home Sundays and read the paper. Of these two great bodies, the Big Church stayed away probably because it feels much as Noah did when a storm began to blow up. And the Roman Catholic Church stayed away because it knows there won't be much of a shower, anyway. If there were, there would be something about it in the "Summa Theologiae" of St. Thomas Aquinas. I haven't seen what the Roman Catholics have said of the Rochester Conference, but the *Boston Pilot* approved of the stand taken for the divinity of Jesus by the Federation Conference (meaning the shutting of the door in the face of the Unitarians), and the Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy in another Catholic paper commended the irenic spirit which prompted the gathering, and mentioned the significant fact that Catholics and Protestants found themselves able to

cooperate in good works, as in associated charities. The purpose of the Federation, by the way, is "to promote catholic unity," but "catholic" and "Catholic" are not quite the same. Not quite.

### **BIG CHURCH DOCTRINE**

The Big Church would have approved the Rochester Conference the more heartily of the two. For instance, Rabbi Schulman, of the Temple Beth-El, of New York, in his paper, "Our Definition of Religion," said that "religion is human life lived in the presence of God." Prof. Joseph Leighton, of Hobart College, in the discussion following, denied that the idea of God was necessary to religion, which in his turn he defined as "the tendency of personality to enlarge itself, the persistent demand for the ideal by the actual. Religion represents the demands of the individual for ideal environment," differing from philosophy mainly in method. This does not violently contradict the creed of the Big Church.

But the most radical expression at the Rochester Conference was that of the Rev. Algernon Crapsey, D.D., rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church of that city. He was replying to the Rev. Dr. Josiah L. Strong, who had argued that in order that the coming generation should seek after righteousness of conduct it behooved us to see to it that the public schools taught these three formal dogmas: The existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the future accountability of all men. (By the way, I hear that the proposition to split the kindlings for Dr. Crapsey's bonfire was defeated by a vote of three to two.)

In this discussion he said: "I must take issue with Dr. Strong. The remedy he proposes is impracticable, and the three dogmas of the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the future accountability of all men are without ethical value. The Mohammedan believes all three far more devoutly, far more earnestly than the average Christian, and because he believes he

murders Christians. The Russian believes all three, and because he believes he massacres the Jews. Those who have been prominent in the conduct of affairs, those whose wealth threatens the country now, are firm believers in the three propositions. If you were to pick out a man to-day who stands firmest for these three things it would be the Master of Standard Oil.

"Every man's God – for 'God' is an abstract term – every man's God is the exact reflection of that man's moral nature. He makes his God in his own image. It is impossible to do otherwise. Therefore, a man's God to any human mind is simply the measure of his own ethical progress. Therefore, you will get in the name of God every sort of action from the sacrifice of a man's son upon an altar to the sacrifice of himself upon the cross.

"To teach the existence of God is not to advance at all. It is the same with belief in man's immortality, because a man's notion of the life he is to live beyond will exactly correspond with the life he is living now. When we think of immortality it is with the idea of continuation, going on and doing the same things we are doing now. We seek to keep on in our own personality, we shrink from annihilation; our picture of the life beyond is a reproduction of the life we are living here. It is without ethical value.

### **ORTHODOX INSURANCE THIEVES**

"So with the accountability of man," continued Dr. Crapsey. "Our notion of how we are to account for ourselves will accord with our ethical conception of what we do here. I do not think for a moment that those gentlemen lately so much spoken of in the public prints have been disturbed in their sleep, because I have known some of them. Those men who have taken \$150,000 a year for not knowing anything about life-insurance are all real believers in God, in their own immortality and accountability, but their understanding of it is such that they can account for



every dollar they have taken; can account to themselves, and thus account to God."

That's Big Church doctrine, pretty High, perhaps, certainly very much Higher than Bob Ingersoll. As for Tom Paine – oh, well, he was a Low Churchman, away 'way down Low. That is, he would be nowadays. The essence of their doctrines is the same: That belief in the supernatural has no influence on conduct. But hark to this that follows from Dr. Crapsey: "We are living to-day in the midst of a great dissolution. *We are standing by the death-bed of a great religion.*" That's Big Church through and through.

In the discussion following, the Rev. Nelson Millard, D.D., said that the students of parochial schools where the teaching of religion is an emphatic factor were not more moral than those of the so-called "godless" public schools. He added: "In the South there is a very bad state of morals. Yet the South is most orthodox. The three points of belief in God, the immortality of the soul, and the future accountability of all men are well understood. Also, it is a demonstrated fact that Mammon is unimpeachably orthodox."

### **AN IMMINENT CRISIS**

The Rev. Dr. Strong in closing said that he had been making investigations himself, and he had found that the hundred richest men in the United States who had the greatest influence in the financial world are **[R3874 : page 327]** almost without exception orthodox Church members.

Here, at any rate, more came out of the bag than was put into it. What has this assumption that Mammon is immoral, no matter how orthodox it may be; what has this statement that this is an "age of dissolution," and that "we are standing by the death-bed of a great religion," to do with finding a common ground of

unity of all faiths? What has it to do with federating the churches, and trying to get the scuffling sects at home to show the same table-manners that they do in the missionary field, where they do not all grab for the same piece at once, but carve the turkey so that it will go all around? Very much, very much indeed to do with it. "This anxious gathering of the churches shows that they believe a religious crisis to be at hand. It is also a social crisis."

The Inter-Church Conference was less moved by this impending crisis than that at Rochester. Its getting together was more numerous and prolonged, but that was all. It was right after the elections, when, as you recollect, men heard the voice of God speaking through the people as it had never been heard before. The earth was still trembling with it. The laymen who spoke had much to say about the "awakened heart and conscience of the people" and the "new impulse toward civic righteousness," but all that got entirely by the reverend clergy, white-headed within and without. Their latest news on any subject is dated 1859.

### **THE CLERGY BEHIND THE TIMES**

Apparently they could not discern the signs of the times. If they saw at all, they saw only that the evening sky of a dying day shines redly through the gloom. They wist not that it promises that the morrow shall be fair, fairer than earth has ever seen before. I heard one gentleman with a white tie whose theme was "Labor and Capital" make a fervent and a loud appeal for "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work," the open Bible, and the public schools. I am sure if he had had more time he would have said a good word for wearing rubbers when it is wet. And a bishop who may be described as the most extinct of his species squabbled and scolded at apartment-houses as destroyers of the home, and denounced the law by which a woman tied to a drunken, worthless hound may free herself and her children from him.

To tell the honest truth, it wasn't much better at Rochester. The paper read that attracted the keenest attention was that of the Rev. Washington Gladden, D.D., on "The Relations of Moral Teachers to Predatory Wealth." He said that "predatory wealth" was that which has been "gained by plunder rather than by legitimate commerce, and which is used to promote the facilities of plunder. It has not been won by open and honorable competition, but by getting unfair and generally unlawful advantages; by secret agreements and rebates; by the liberal use of money to corrupt legislation and to subsidize the press; by using trust funds for private purposes; by arts which corrupt character and destroy the foundations of the social order..... It is childish," he urged, "to deny the existence of a class of rich men whose presence is a menace to liberty and a blight upon the national life.....The battle of the mart is often fierce, and men are often tempted to be hard and false and cruel. But the ordinary American manufacturer is not in intent, or in fact, a thief or a plunderer.....We may admit that he is not a saint, but he is not a pirate, and there are a number of things he will not do to win a fortune."

And so on. The moral teacher, this being the case, must carefully distinguish between millions made honestly and millions made piratically. The truth is that "tainted money" taken by the moral teacher for his Church or charity or college does more harm than it does good. It isn't like taking the contributions of a gambler or the keeper of a house of ill-fame, because they are under the ban, and it is understood that whatever gifts they give will not take off the curse. But the predatory rich ought to be under the ban and are not. They are applauded, flattered, and courted; they sit in the seats of the mighty, which is an awful miscarriage of justice.

Dr. Gladden's economics may be summed up by the statement that you have a right to beat your wife, only you

mustn't hit her with a wagon-spoke. The moral teacher and panhandler may take the money gained by "open and honorable competition," but he must give back that "gained by plunder."

### **GRAFT IN THE WAGE SYSTEM**

"Open and honorable competition!" What do our "moral teachers" think the scuffle for a living is? A game of tiddledywinks? If two starving men see a loaf of bread, is it going to be "After you, my dear Alphonse"? And if the two starving men see one job of work, will one give way to the other or will each underbid the other until the man that gets the job makes out of it just enough to keep him going? Part of what the Federation of Churches is to do when it gets started is to denounce "graft." Indeed, but what's the whole wage system but graft? What are profits but the difference between what a man earns and what he can live on, that difference going to his employer as a tip, a gratuity, a bribe – graft, if you please? And this employer must enter into "open and honorable competition" with others in the same business. Tell me, you American merchants and manufacturers whom Dr. Gladden praises so, how is it with you? Is it "After you, my dear Alphonse," or is it "Dog eat dog"? You know well enough what you hate to do and yet what you've got to do or go out of business. You've no illusions about "open and honorable competition." Is there such a thing? Tell me. Honestly now.....

### **CHURCH COMPETITION**

If there were, we'll say, a dozen factories in a given trade, each outfitted with an expensive plant and a long salary list, but just managing to scrape along, working on half-time, we should see something doing in the reorganizing line right suddenly. It calls for no great intellect to see the similarity of a dozen denominations in a town, all outfitted with expensive plants, churches with stained-glass windows, altars, pulpits, organs,

pews, carpets, Bibles, hymn-books, prayer-books, lesson-leaves; officered with pastors, lay-readers, organists, choristers, teachers, vestries, ushers, sextons, and Ladies' Aids; heated, lighted, swept, and garnished; running on one-seventh time and a little while after supper on Wednesday evenings, to very light business; all in debt up to the roots of their noses, and all grabbing [R3875 : page 328] after any stranger that appears. (I must tell you of a personal experience of mine. I was in my shirt sleeves and ragged trousers, opening up the barrel that had the dishes in it, when the bell rang. The gentleman in black I found at the door apologized for interrupting before we had got settled in our new home. "But," said he, "there's so much competition nowadays, I thought I'd call early and ask you to come to *our* Church.")

The fruits of competition are skimmed wages and scamped wares. Did you ever have to look to a vestry or the Church trustees for your money? I hope not. I know a very fine young man who, a little while ago, contemplated taking holy orders. His mother was distressed to death about it. It was terrible for her to think of him just throwing his life away, as you might say. And that brings me to another personal reminiscence. The rector of the parish went past the barber shop. "A fine man," I said to the barber. And he was, too, the finest all-around man I think I ever knew. "Yes," said the barber, "a fine man – in a mighty poor business. I'd be ashamed to get my living that way."

## **CLERGYMEN AND CHURCH FAIRS**

And the barber isn't the only one of that opinion. Once in a while you get an inkling of what the clergy think about it themselves. Do you suppose when they were in the seminary, all on fire with high and holy enthusiasm for the souls of men, they ever thought it would come to trotting from hen-party to hen-party, from the Ladies' Aid to the Helping Hand; to rigging up

catchpenny devices wherewith to get in the winter's coal, or pay the interest on the debt; to naming committees who should "mace" the department stores and the neighborhood groceries for contributions to the fancy-goods counter and the household counter, cash if you can get it, but if not, something to sell chances on? Do you suppose they like to do that? I know that some won't allow chances to be sold at Church fairs. They say it's gambling. I don't admire a gambler greatly, but I guess I think full as well of him as I do of a beggar.

Do you suppose the clergy like to do this sort of thing? Not more than you, American merchant and manufacturer, like to do the things you have to do or get out of the business, the things we know about, but will not tell here. You have to; so do the clergy.

Who can thunder at the Mammon of unrighteousness when the Mammon of unrighteousness is right down there in the best pew, when he is on the board of trustees and pulls the parish out of every financial hole, and when in an age of rampant unbelief he is "unimpeachably orthodox"? Who can denounce "predatory wealth" from the pulpit for getting "unfair advantages" and railroad rebates when the churches share the benefits of government and dodge paying taxes, and the clergy get transportation at half rates?

### **RICH MEN'S SINS UNREBUKED**

If a son ask his father for bread, will he give him a stone? Ask your fathers in God for counsel. Shall I, as alderman, take the consideration that this set of capitalists wants to give me for a street-railway franchise? Somebody will get it if I don't. Shall I, as capitalist, give up to the demands of the aldermen? If I don't, the other set will, the set that would ask nothing better than to down me. What shall I do?

It isn't because your fathers in God don't mean to do right, but because they don't know what is right. There's nothing about these problems in Suarez; there's nothing about them in Pearson on the Creed. All are very clear as to the wickedness of taking chickens off a roost after dark. That's a poor man's sin. But when it comes to the consideration of the fact that the [R3876 : page 328] public street is the only place in which we are free men, and that in every other place we exist only on the sufferance of our lords, who treat us as conquered people; that the very center of these streets solemnly dedicated to our common use is taken by our lords for their own private use, a continuous strip of the best city real estate, which no money could or should buy – the right of way of a street railroad – why, that's a rich man's sin.

The experiment of Federation has been tried. Doubtless you have lived in a small town where there was a Union Church. There weren't enough Baptists or Methodists or Presbyterians or Lutherans or Congregationalists for each to maintain a separate little conventicle, so they all combined. Instead of a dozen stoves, they had one big comfortable furnace, and saved on the coal bill; instead of a dozen reed organs, or footy little heart-breaking thousand-dollar organs, they had one \$10,000 organ that you could do something with; instead of a dozen preachers that hemmed and hawed and stumbled through their sentences, making a brave stagger at getting verbs to agree with their subjects, they had one smart, fine-looking man who could talk it right off. A great advantage over the old system. Yes, but as soon as enough Baptists and Methodists and Lutherans and Presbyterians and Congregationalists moved into town for each sect to set up its own conventicle, they left the Union Church.

### **AT THE DEATH-BED OF A RELIGION**

Just hold that a minute, and consider another experiment in Federation, the Young Men's Christian Association. That is far

from fizzling out. What's the difference? The Y.M.C.A. looks to the good of all, physical, mental, and moral. Right now. Here on earth. "Service" is its motto, not "support." That's the difference.

The Rev. Dr. Crapsey has told us that we are standing by the death-bed of a great religion. Some of us are. An increasing number. But not all. This great religion is very much alive indeed, and long will be, to every man yet in that stage of progress in which he thinks that nothing is more important than that he save his own particular little soul. The whole world may well be lost if only he is not. What does it matter anyhow, these cruel wrongs, these black injustices, this trampling down of human souls and bodies by those who have seized the earth for their own possession? It will all be over in a few years, and then – a heaven of endless happiness.

So long as "he that believeth not shall be damned," it is highly important to be "unimpeachably orthodox," and so to save one's soul (which is not incompatible with gaining the whole world, too, as Mr. Rockefeller has shown us). Federation with those who have **[R3876 : page 329]** different notions of the way to sharpen a lead-pencil will not appeal to such.

Those of us who have risen beyond such blunt, frank selfishness, who turn the question end for end, and ask what it shall profit the world if it be wholly lost to save here and there a soul, will not linger in the death-chamber to see how long the doctor's oxygen of Federation defers the inevitable.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and so must die; that which is born of the spirit is spirit, and can never die. All this clothes-line quarreling of the churches is born of the flesh, and except they be born again of the Spirit of the Coming Age, they cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith now as of old time, "How can these things be? Can all the sects enter the second time into their mother's womb and be born?" And, as of



old, is the answer: They must be born again. They must start all over, start now as in the very beginning with the vivid expectation of the speedy coming of that age in which the sword of competition shall be beaten into the plowshare of cooperation, so that in no line of effort shall we be forced to skimp wages and scamp wares; when our government in city, state, and nation shall privilege no man or set of men, but shall be so just that it shall be in very deed the kingdom of God. "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously, every man against his brother?"

### **"EVEN SO, COME!"**

That was how Christianity started. In their little sodalities they had all things in common, so the Bible says. "The communion of saints" was no empty phrase to them. And why did they look so earnestly for His coming, expecting it any day? Because then that kingdom, the Life of the Coming Age, would spread the whole earth over. And we, too, who see the western sky of this dying day all flaming with the red glow that promises a fair morrow; we, too, who have heard with our ears the oracles of God, speaking to us in the voice of the people last November; we, too, whose hearts are torn with grief at sight of the miseries of our brothers, when the world is rich enough for all; we, too, who see how special privilege rots the very souls of those who hold it; we, too, must pray the words the early Christians prayed, putting our own meaning upon them, it is true, but longing with the same unutterable longing as theirs – we, too, must cry with them, *Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!*

### **OUR VIEW OF THE FOREGOING**

In the above is set forth the sentiment of the worldly wise in respect to the federation of the various denominations. This class of thinkers usually take a very practical view of everything, and mix with it very little of faith in the supernatural. It is still

fashionable to refer to a personal God, though a great many of the worldly wise have lost any real conception of such a being, and think of God as merely a great force or power in nature. Others personifying nature as a God, leave out all thought of a personal being of body, shape and parts, willing, thinking, planning, creating, maintaining, etc., "working all things according to the counsel of his own will." (Eph. 1:11.) To this type of mind, which is to be found in many pulpits, banking houses and among many of the more intelligent mechanics, and which is rapidly growing, the foregoing article will appeal strongly. The last paragraph of the article, for instance, illustrates our point. The writer sees Socialism, and he sees that there was a start in this direction in the early Church at Jerusalem. He approves of that start, not as a divine example of what ought to be, but as a mere suggestion of something greater, that men will work out for themselves shortly. He dreams of an ideal kingdom in which love will be the controlling influence, and hopes that man will bring this about for himself through Socialism, though perhaps not without trials and difficulties by the way.

To this writer and others the voice of the people last November was the voice of Nature – the voice of Reason, the voice of Right, the voice of God. To him it speaks of a social revolution and the bringing in by Socialism of a glorious Millennium. Carrying his figure of speech to the closing words of the article, he quotes a Scripture passage respecting the Lord's second advent, "Even so come, Lord Jesus." Not that he believes in the second coming of Jesus, but that the expectation of the early Church – that the second coming of Jesus would bring the Millennial Kingdom – accords somewhat with the conception of the worldly wise, in that they are hoping for the Spirit of Jesus to come into the world through Socialism – hoping for the spirit of love to gradually take possession of the world and reorganize it, and bring in the new heavens and new earth.

As the Prophet has declared, "God is not in all their thoughts" – such plans and schemes of Socialism, etc., are purely worldly wise and are far from the hopes and expectations of those who are truly the Lord's people and directed by his Word. From our standpoint, the overturning of the political machines and the investigation of trusts and the bringing them under a measure of governmental control, are all very good in their way, as indicating that the world in general desires righteousness to the extent that they can see righteousness. Where their earthly interests would be advantaged, they would welcome so-called reforms, investigations, better politics, etc., but otherwise not.

Alas, the poor world does not know itself: it does not realize that selfishness is at the basis of its every move and ambition; that the number who are not thus moved, controlled, is so insignificantly small as to be without weight and influence. Nor is it our thought to deride any efforts toward righteousness, even though they be inspired by selfish motives. We merely point out that the true Christian view of matters is a still different one – is the Bible one – that it recognizes God, the divine will, purpose, plan, revelation, as having to do with and overruling all of this world's affairs. It sees in the present upheaval of politics, the present uncovering of financial scandals, etc., another force making ready for the great time of trouble which the Scriptures indicate will be fully upon us in 1915, and gradually approaching in the meantime.

From this standpoint it has been necessary that the gross superstition of the "dark ages" should to a considerable extent be dissipated, that the minds of the people might be set free, not only from a religious superstition but also set free from allied superstitions respecting the divine right of certain families to inherit **[R3877 : page 330]** the kingdoms, the dominions of the world, and to live on higher places of social privilege than other families. All these matters are now coming in review before the

world, and Socialism is rapidly coming to the fore as the world's savior, deliverer from priestcraft, superstition, and political and financial autocracy. The world is being invited to look not to him who redeemed us with his precious blood, and promised to come again and establish his Kingdom in righteousness, but to look to itself, to its own affairs, to its own success at the polls, etc., as the only hope – thus ignoring the Lord and his overruling providences and the divine inspiration respecting **[R3877 : page 330]** the future outcome of present conditions in a glorious Millennial Kingdom.

From our standpoint the gathering of the churches is the fulfilment of Scriptural prediction, and the Lord's intelligent and faithful and consecrated people are warned against having any part in any such Church federations, the Word of the Lord being to such, "Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear nor be afraid." (Isa. 8:12.) It is the tares that are to be federated and bundled and gathered together for the great trouble time, which is shortly in a great revolution of society to set fire to all the social, religious, financial institutions and arrangements of this present time, eventuating in anarchy, which by overthrowing all things incompatible with righteousness will prepare the way for the Kingdom of God's dear Son at his second advent, a spirit being, in power and great glory, which will be manifested in various ways through earthly channels and agents.

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