

## Original Contributions.

## HINDERANCES TO CHRISTIAN UNION.

BY F. M. RAINS.

The present divided state of Christian society is much deplored by all of God's faithful children. That such a state is not Scriptural is certain; and that the results flowing from the confusion is not best, but absolutely sinful, is equally certain. God intended that his children should be one, the Savior prayed for this union, and the apostle Paul rebuked division in the strongest language and with the most unanswerable arguments. The charity of the great apostle was not broad enough to enable him to say that in the goodness and wisdom of God his children would be divided and subdivided till sects and parties would be counted by the hundreds. He would not excuse the sect spirit of the Corinthians by teaching them that Jesus was the vine and the different parties the branches, but he would teach the most indissoluble union by this beautiful language of the Savior. The scholarly and erudite teacher rebuked the schismatic spirit in its incipency. And in doing so his words stand as an everlasting condemnation of a divided Christendom, and he becomes an example to us, as preacher, worthy of our closest imitation. The confusion here contemplated is dishonoring to God; it is unloyalty to the Savior; and violates the plainest passages of the sacred Scriptures. It paralyzes the usefulness of the church, fosters the spirit of envy and strife, and conduces to indifference and infidelity. It destroys the peace of homes, squanders money in the name of religion, perverts the word of God, hinders the spread of the gospel, and sends thousands to the grave without God and without hope.

The preacher who will not rebuke this division and do all in his power for Christian union is either ignorant of the teaching of God's word or is a moral coward; and either case is disgrace to pure Christianity, and becomes *particeps criminis* in this great sin.

From the days Arius and Athanasius who divided on the difference between an *i* and an *o*, parties have multiplied, over matters of as little real significance, as the apparent differences between these letters. And perhaps no century

has been more prolific in division than the last. These divisions can now be arranged into groups or families, and these families can be counted by scores. Good men have talked much of and prayed much for the union of God's people.

Volumes have been written and learned and eloquent sermons have been preached, all looking to the one blessed end—when we should all see eye to eye and walk hand in hand.

We have been told by the preachers and editors that the time would soon come when we would all be one. But, brethren, I do not believe it. I do not believe the churches will be united in this world. Never again will the disciples be one as in the day of the apostles. Denominational lines will not be broken, till crushed by death. And this judgment does not impede my work for such a union. Not at all. We do not believe that all men will obey the gospel and be saved, and yet we work unremittingly to that end. It is our business to watch carefully our duty and perform it, and leave results with God. Duty is ours, results are his. Let us say with Watts, "Let party names be heard no more." And yet we can truly say with another:

"In vain ye say, Let sects and systems fall,  
And Jesus' precious name be all in all;  
In vain ye say 'By his blest name alone  
His members should while here on earth be known';  
Yet cling to what that gracious Jesus pains—  
Sectarian union and sectarian names."

What do we mean by Christian union? Unless we have some well defined views just here, we will not fail to blunder in our discussion and in our work. The term *union* is used as expressing just the opposite of division, and then nothing more strongly forbidden than divisions. We are commanded to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment, and that there be no divisions among us. The degree of closeness required by this command is more fully explained by the apostle in another place where he says, "There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Seven specifications of unity are here mentioned. When all these are found to exist among Christians then we will have that union the Scriptures require. There is

one *body* to comprehend all, one *spirit* to animate all, one *hope* to inspire all, one *Lord* to govern all, one *faith* to unite all, and one *baptism* to induct all into the one body.

The hinderances to a union like this are numerous and varied, but I shall notice only a few of them and that briefly. My object is to be suggestive rather than exhaustive.

1. The first hinderance I note is want of a proper standard of *authority*. On this question society vacillates all the way from the infallibility of reason to a so-called infallible papacy. An infallible reason, an infallible experience, an infallible church, an infallible creed, and an infallible book—the Bible, are all presented to the world as infallible authority. Protestants and Catholics alike cling to the traditions of the "Fathers," and trust the ex-cathedra interpretation of uninspired men. It is man's inherent nature to demand infallibility in matters of his religion. Invest him with the clear and well defined conviction that his religious faith, in whatever it may consist or whatever may be its object, is infallible, and you bind him as in fetters of iron; and you can not blame him for this, it is but the reasonable demand of his spiritual nature. Rome, as between an infallible church, or an infallible book, gave her people the former. This is the fundamental and central idea of of Popery. She has crystalized around this doctrine, and crush this and you will see the fabric crumble into dust! But when we can get the world to accept an infallible book as infallible authority, then we have made one step toward Christian union. I do not wish to destroy the idea of infallibility, but wish to insist on the authority of the one blessed book. Let us place the Bible above all churches, and let us make it arbiter in all things spiritual. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." It will be a long time before the religious world will appreciate the supreme authority of the word of truth, and yet we can never hope for union till this work is accomplished. Then the question of authority constitutes hinderance to Christian union.

2. When the question of authority is settled the next hinderance we find is a want of knowledge concerning what the Bible teaches. The religious world is yet clad in the habiliments of ignorance and error, fashionably and popularly masked, presides over the theologies which exist, like useless plants in the gardens of present religious society. This is an awful and most deplorable fact. And before the union of God's people can be effected and the world truly Christianized the dark cloud of ignorance and superstition must be chased away by the radiant and blazing light of sound Scriptural teaching. The laws of nature are sufficiently minute and special to guide and govern the least as well as the greatest thing in being, and so the law of the Lord, when properly understood and reverently appreciated, is sufficient not only to guide all men to Jesus but to bring all his professed followers into one glorious and harmonious body.

Religious teachers have not learned how to properly divide and subdivide the word of truth. They do not approach this book as they would any other volume, expecting its different parts to have a distinct and well defined purpose. To many of them the Old Testament is as binding upon the Christian as the New Testament. They see no difference in the object of the book of Psalms and that of the book of Acts. Like a prominent clergyman of this State, when a young man asked him what he must do to be saved, sent him to the 19th Psalm, and told him to read that carefully and prayerfully, and that the light would brake upon his understanding by so doing. We can never hope to unite the churches while ignorance as profound and as unpardonable as this is to be found among the preachers. Unless we can agree in the elementary teaching of the gospel we can never hope to be of one mind in other particulars. What know they of the difference between the covenant made with Abraham and the covenant in Jesus? Correctly they know nothing. It is the same with them. Babies were in that covenant, and therefore they are to be in the church of Jesus Christ. They do not understand that that covenant was purely fleshly and temporal, while this is spiritual and eternal. Of the difference between the gospel in promise, in prospect, and in fact they know nothing.