

**REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS
AT THE REUNION CONFERENCE
HELD AT BONN ON SEPTEMBER
14, 15 AND 16, 1874**

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Report of the Proceedings at the Reunion Conference Held at Bonn on September 14, 15 and 16, 1874 by E. M. B. & H. P. Liddon

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E. M. B. & H. P. LIDDON

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REPORT
OF THE
Proceedings at the Reunion Conference
HELD AT BONN
ON SEPTEMBER 14, 15, AND 16, 1874

Translated from the German of Professor Reusch

BY
E. M. B.



WITH A PREFACE BY H. P. LIDDON.

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PREFACE.

“WHEN so many threatening forms of infidelity
“ are attacking our Christian belief on one side,
“ and Vaticanism is putting forth its altogether
“ new propositions about the constitution and
“ faith of the Church of Christ on the other,
“ ought not all we, who profess to follow the
“ ancient Catholic Church as the keeper and
“ unfold of the Holy Scriptures, to be able to
“ come to an understanding with each other?
“ Surely this should not be impossible, unless we
“ are rather stupid, or, perhaps, even self-willed.”

These were almost, if not quite, the exact words in which, in the course of a walk at Munich, three years ago, the revered and distinguished President of the Reunion Conference at Bonn first introduced to the writer his plan for assembling members of the Eastern, English,

and American Churches to confer with himself and with other German theologians upon some of the vexed questions which have for so many centuries impaired the visible unity of the Body of Christ. His governing motive in making this proposal was to do what in him lay towards removing the most serious of all hindrances to the reception of the Christian faith by the heathen abroad and by unbelievers at home. As he has said elsewhere :¹

That Christ, the Founder of the Church, desired and enjoined its unity is clear. In His Eucharistic prayer we read, "That they all may be one ; that as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."² Nay, this unity is, as He further prays, to be a perfect one, and therefore the most penetrating and purest conceivable among men. And here it is especially to be noted that this unity of Christian believers is itself to serve as the means to a further end ; it is to be a testimony for the world in general, and for all nations, of the truth and divinity of the teaching of Christ. And such it was in the early ages. "See how these Christians love one another,"

¹ *Lectures on the Reunion of the Churches.* By DR. J. IGNATIUS VON DÖLLINGER. Translated by H. N. OXENHAM. London : Rivingtons. Pages 14, 15.

² S. John xvii. 21.

was then a common saying of the heathen. According to the will of our Lord, men ought always to be able to say, "A religion which unites its adherents, and holds together a vast society so closely, without any coercion, through the Spirit which animates it, bears the impress of its truth and divinity." And thereby He has of course given us to understand that ecclesiastical divisions and a multiplicity of separate Churches will produce just the opposite impression on non-Christian nations, and on many Christians too, and will be to them a great stumbling-block and occasion of serious doubt as to the truth of Christianity. Any one who wishes to realise this has only to ask some educated Jew resident among us what impression the strife and controversy of the Churches make upon him.

It has indeed been maintained that the true unity of the Christian Church is purely invisible; that it consists in an unrealised companionship of believing souls around the throne of Christ, while, at the same time, the acts, the words, and even the passionate feelings of these very souls are ranged in hostile array against each other. Indeed, some writers have gone so far as to describe the desire for a visible unity as "carnal;" and they would appear to think that the spectacle of a number of religious organisations, all owning the Name of the Prince of Peace, and very constantly and energetically at

war with one another, is really agreeable to His Holy Will.

Now if Holy Scripture is to be our rule, it is impossible to acquiesce in such an opinion as this. Our Lord's prayer on the eve of His Passion has been already referred to; and the teaching of His great Apostle is a significant commentary on its purport. St. Paul is proclaiming the Divine ideal when he tells us that there is "one body and one spirit."¹ Not "one spirit" only pervading a multitude of separated believers, but "one body," by membership in which they appear before the world, as forming an organic whole. Apart from this ideal, the Apostle's comparison of the Church of Christ to the framework of the human body is obviously inappropriate;² and his stern rebuke of the separatist tendencies which were manifesting themselves at Corinth³ would have been somewhat unreasonable, if the visible unity of the Christian society were not really part of the

¹ Eph. iv. 4.

² 1 Cor. xii. 12-27.

³ 1 Cor. i. 11, 13.

Divine Will. Indeed, upon modern grounds, the Corinthians might well have rejoined, that their mutual antagonism before the eyes of men involved the advantage of making their real but inappreciable union all the more striking, since, "in the absence of any maintenance of visible oneness among Christians, there would be no risk of externalising the idea" of unity.

In point of fact, this depreciation of the blessing and sacredness of visible unity has no warrant in Scripture whatever. It is partly due to the tendency of exaggerated forms of Protestantism to resolve all the facts of the Christian life, as well as of the Christian Creed, into subjective impressions upon thought and feeling, and so ultimately to deny their reality altogether. But it is more directly traceable to an historical cause—the divisions which resulted from the Reformation. So long as there was a hope that Western Christendom might retain its unity, the visibility of the Church was not denied by the Reformed. Calvin had as clear an idea of a united Christian body,