

**REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS AT THE
REUNION CONFERENCE HELD AT BONN
BETWEEN THE 10TH AND 16TH OF
AUGUST, 1875: TRANSLATED FROM THE
GERMAN OF PROFESSOR REUSCH**

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REUSCH & H. P. LIDDON

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GERMAN OF PROFESSOR REUSCH**

A. Lukyn Williams
REPORT *Yes: Col. Lamb.*
March 1876.

OF THE

Proceedings at the Reunion Conference

HELD AT BONN

BETWEEN THE 10TH AND 16TH OF AUGUST, 1875

Translated from the German of Professor Reusch

WITH A PREFACE

BY

H. P. LIDDON D.D.

Canon of St. Paul's

Union-Conference Bonn, 1875.

*Σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητά τοῦ
πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης.*

Eph. S. Paul ad Eph. iv. 3

LONDON

BASIL MONTAGU PICKERING

196 PICCADILLY

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1886

PREFACE.

IT is not, perhaps, surprising that persons warmly interested in the work of promoting unity among Christians should have complained of the unfriendly tones in which the Conferences at Bonn have been frequently criticised by English writers. And yet, surely, there is nothing to be wondered at either in the fact or the terms of such criticism. To begin with, it should be remembered that everybody who talks or writes does not feel a passionate interest in the prosperity of the Christian Church. A man is not likely to wish the Church of Christ to be united and strong, unless he already wishes well to the Truth which the Church embodies and propagates; in other terms, unless he is a religious man. But if, unhappily, his sympathies are hostile to religion, he does not feel bound to say so when criticising a religious movement. Nor, indeed, in these days, does every religious man desire the unity of the Christian Church. Strange as it may well seem, there are thousands of persons in this country whose

religion, serious and conscientious though it be, begins and ends with themselves. Such is their dread of losing sight of individual responsibility and personal spiritual life, through the sense of membership in a world-wide corporation, that they have forgotten a large part of the declared will of that Master Whom they desire to serve. They have forgotten that He came on earth, not merely to save the souls of men, one by one, but also to found a Society, whose cohesion and vigour is now, as always, dear to His Heart. They have passed over as utterly as if it were absent from their Bibles all that they might learn about the "Body of Christ,"—the visibly organised fellowship of Christians under Christ their Head. They may, indeed, co-operate with other Christians for practical purposes. But such co-operation appears to them to be strictly a matter of expediency and choice; and how the particular association which binds them to some fellow-believers is marshalled and governed is not, they think, a point of real religious importance. Then, again, other Christians who are keenly alive to this side of their responsibility to Christ our Lord, believe that the only unity which He approves is that which centres in, and is controlled by, the Pope of Rome. This is not the place for shewing that such a conception is not sanctioned by Holy Scripture, or in early Chris-

tian antiquity, and that it is chiefly due to political aspirations, natural and vigorous in those ages, which witnessed and followed upon the destruction of the Western Empire. It is enough to observe that none of the great sections of opinion here indicated can be reasonably expected to sympathise with the Bonn Conferences. Christian unity cannot be welcome to those who at heart do not wish well to Christianity. Unity upon the principles of Catholic antiquity cannot be grateful to the disciples of ultra-Protestant individualism. Catholic Unity, in its primitive freedom, cannot approve itself to the children of the modern Papacy.

Not that the criticisms which have been provoked by the Bonn Conferences proceed exclusively from such quarters as those which have been noticed. The late Bishop Wilberforce once observed that a work supposed to be good could not be held to be really good until it had been found fault with by some excellent people, who might have been expected to give it their sympathy and support. There are obvious risks in trusting too unreservedly to such a criterion of goodness as this. But, if it is at all trustworthy, the well-wishers of the Bonn Conferences have reason to be satisfied. Some natural friends of the cause, which was represented at Bonn, have at times echoed the

observations of its natural enemies ; and it is needless to observe that, if some of these criticisms may seem to be hasty or in part irrational, others must be entitled to respectful attention, and may yet do good service to the enterprise which has suggested them.

I.

That the Reunion of Christian Churches is an object difficult of attainment, is obvious enough. In this respect, it resembles most things that are really worth having in this world: the ancients had a well-known proverb about the difficulty of virtue. But it is often assumed, at least in this connection, that what is confessedly difficult is virtually impossible ; and we cannot too clearly recognize the falsehood of this assumption, especially when applied to the things of the Kingdom of God. The history of the Church is, in fact, a history of vanquished difficulties. What Christian of the second century would have anticipated the baptism of the Roman Cæsar in the fourth ? What witness of the havoc wrought upon the old Roman civilization by the invading barbarians would have looked forward to the speedy conversion of those very barbarians into the most faithful children of the Church ? Who of the Catholic contemporaries of Athanasius

would have foretold the later collapse of Arianism? How could anybody living in the heart of the Middle Ages have imagined the possibility of such movements as those of the age of the Reformation? What would have been thought of a prediction of the religious restorations throughout Western Christendom which have marked the second and third quarters of the present century, if it had been made when the Encyclopædists reigned in Paris, and the first enthusiasm of the French Revolution was carrying all before it? Not to insist upon other illustrations, which touch English Churchmen more nearly and which will readily occur to them, we must recognize in Church history a continuous warning against confusing the difficult with the strictly impossible. The forces at work in the Kingdom of Grace transcend the limits of natural experience, and what has been may be expected to repeat itself. "The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save."

Unquestionably the difficulties which may be pointed at as forbidding the hopes of Christian unity that are encouraged by the Conferences at Bonn are formidable enough. Apart from dogmatic questions, there is the divergence of tone and of sympathies which is engendered by long periods of separation; there is the compact mass of recognised and unrecognised prejudice which every