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THE KIKUYU SCHEME OF FEDERATION.*

"THE details of the Scheme of Federation may be fairly open to criticism or even to repudiation. Not so . . . the principle which actuated its promoters."¹

If this passage from the Archbishop of Canterbury's recent pronouncement be read in its context, it will be seen that his Grace uses the word "details" in quite a relative sense. He cannot mean by it unimportant particulars, for he proceeds to criticize and repudiate actual hinges of the Scheme. Similarly the "principle" he commends is not the underlying idea of the Federation, but the spirit of Christian brotherhood and the zeal for the Kingdom of God shewn at Kikuyu. Thus interpreted this quotation probably voices the bulk of Christian opinion in these lands. It certainly expresses the attitude of the two Missionary Societies primarily concerned. On December 9th, 1913, the Church Missionary Society considered the Kikuyu proposals: they approved in general of steps towards reunion, "without necessarily assenting to the details and wording of the proposed scheme." The Foreign Missions Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland shortly after passed a resolution of similar tenour, declaring expressly that "organic union is yet in the future." We all agree that co-operation with Non-episcopal Christian bodies is advisable: but as to the actual proposals, especially if

**The Kikuyu Conference: A Study in Christian Unity*, by J. J. Willis, Bishop of Uganda; together with the Proposed Scheme of Federation embodied in the Resolutions of Conference (Longmans) 6d. *Ecclesia Anglicana. In what does she stand? An open letter to the Right Rev. Father in God, Edgar Lord Bishop of St. Albans*, by Frank Bishop of Zanzibar (Longmans) 6d. net. *Kikuyu*, by the Archbishop of Canterbury (Macmillans) 1s.

¹ *Kikuyu*, p. 15.

they go further than co-operation, we reserve the right to criticize and if necessary reject them.

At the time of writing the fate of the Kikuyu scheme is uncertain. Most probably it has received its *coup de grâce*. "Recognition of common membership between the Churches in the Federation" is one side of the Kikuyu Quadrilateral. But the Archbishop's pronouncement in effect precludes such recognition. They may come to us but we may not go to them. Permission is given to admit in exceptional circumstances other Christians to our altars; but there is to be no reciprocity; we are forbidden to receive the Holy Communion at the hands of Non-Church ministers. To offer hospitality without accepting it argues, to say the least, a certain aloofness, and Kikuyu has no use for aloofness.

But his Grace's utterance drives yet another wedge into the scheme. It throws co-operation and federation into sharp contrast. Co-operation may be arranged by those on the spot. Federation compromises the parent body and is just that step in advance that no part of the line may take till the whole is ready. Lambeth not Kikuyu must give the signal. To quote the Metropolitan's weighty words: "A formal and quasi-constitutional Federation in British East Africa of different denominations, whereof our Church is one, requires, as it seems to me, a sanction which must be more than local."²

The wisdom of this decision is evident when we consider the particular character of the proposed Federation. It is a combine of various missionary agencies to partition British East Africa. To partition is not of course its *raison d'être* or ultimate object, but it is the first and the characteristic item on its programme. From a Churchman's standpoint the proposal is, in fact, to dismember the diocese of Mombasa. At present the Bishop of

² *Kikuyu*, p. 23.

Mombasa rules the whole of British East Africa except the western strip which belongs to the Uganda diocese : under this arrangement he would virtually break up his diocese into districts, retain one and cede the rest. This territorial division underlies the whole structure of the Federation, as our examination of the Scheme will attempt to show. It is a serious departure from precedent, almost a sacrifice of principle, and would in the event, so I believe, defeat its own end and prove a set back to the cause of reunion.

The Kikuyu Conference of June, 1913, had its roots in the past. In 1892 a rebellion occurred in Uganda, and unfortunately it bore the character of a religious war. The Church Missionary Society missionaries and their converts supported the Government, while the Roman Catholics favoured the insurgents. In the next year the Government secured a working agreement between the Church Missionary Society and the Roman Catholics in Uganda : but it is worth noting that Bishop Tucker on behalf of the Church Missionary Society definitely refused to let the understanding take the form of a hard and fast division of territory. This Uganda episode is to-day not much more than a memory, but it explains a certain phase of Government policy in British East Africa that culminated in the proceedings at Kikuyu. The Church Missionary Society was first in the field : and for nearly two generations had met no competition. But during the last decade of the century the Uganda railway was pushing up from the coast, bringing with it obvious facilities for missionary enterprise. Missionary agencies of all sorts came in with a rush, and Government took alarm. The authorities, remembering the Uganda trouble, became, quite needlessly, apprehensive of sectarian troubles in the neighbouring Protectorate of British East Africa. Accordingly they took a strong, almost tyrannical step. Bishop Willis

writes of it as follows: "On more than one occasion, with a view to preventing any possible friction between the Missions, the Government in British East Africa has approached the missionaries with definite suggestions of territorial divisions: such an agreement has been actually arrived at, and is to-day in force; and they have gone further in passing a regulation by which no Mission may build a European station within ten miles of an existing station of another Mission."³ British missionaries are loyal subjects and respect the wishes of the authorities as far as they can in conscience do so; but it is unthinkable that under the British flag missionary societies should be dragooned into accepting a regulation of this sort. If this compulsory dismemberment of a Church diocese is politically a *fait accompli*, it is a distinct invasion of the rights of religious bodies. The voice of the Kikuyu Conference should have been raised in the name of liberty of conscience to repudiate not ratify it. For our present purpose, however, it is sufficient to establish the facts that the idea of territorial division originated with Government and that political pressure was a strong force working behind the scenes at the Kikuyu Conference.

Now let us turn from the origin of the Scheme to the Scheme itself. A number of recognized missionary agencies in British East Africa find they can subscribe a common doctrinal formula. On that basis they propose to found a Federation whose aim and object shall be to establish a united African Church. But why this Federation? The missionary society we know and the Native Church we know but this *tertium quid* seems an unnecessary complication. Why should not these harmonious societies bring into being at once the united African Church? We are not told, but we can guess the answer. It is that the doctrinal basis is not broad

³ Kikuyu Conference, § 24.

enough. The harmony is on the surface only: the old sores are not closed. It is hoped that time will heal them, and make reunion possible; meanwhile the Federation is to do duty as a stop-gap. This would be a bold experiment: in fact it is rather like gambling on the chances of the future. If the time for the United Church is not yet, will it ever be? The country is malleable now: each decade from this on will see it less plastic. Bishop Willis does not expect the Federation to accomplish its task within our generation. If that is so, it can hardly ever accomplish it. Thus after a generation or two the Federation is abandoned as a failure, or—a worse alternative—persists as the nucleus of a new sect.

However, leaving aside forecasts as to its future, we will watch it at work. The territorial division is made, we will suppose, and British East Africa parcelled out, for religious purposes, into about five districts. The Church Missionary Society no doubt will work the largest district. The Scotch Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Baptists and the African Inland Mission (an undenominational society) receive each their share. The Friends and one or two smaller agencies have refused to join and they will have to continue their work unrecognized by the Federation. Each Society is to be supreme in its own district. Without that amount of Home Rule, the Scheme could not have commanded acceptance. For the missionaries assembled at Kikuyu were representatives as well as legislators; they had to think of their constituents at home. After all, the power of the purse is a decisive factor in missionary enterprise. People at home will not contribute the funds unless they are in sympathy with the work done. They pay the piper, and they call the tune. The missionary map of British East Africa will then, like "Canaan divided between the tribes," be a polychrome, each district taking its colour from the views of its home supporters. To some degree the map is in that condi-

tion already: one fears, however, that this Federation Scheme will only serve to fix its colours and make them indelible.

If the consent of the home authorities is secured and the boundaries are agreed on, each Society proceeds to develop the Church in its district, partly along its own lines and partly along lines laid down for it by the Federation. The Federation cannot standardize doctrine; so it has resolved to standardize organization. Kikuyu district may receive one interpretation of the Creed and Mombasa district another,⁴ but inland Kikuyus and Swahilis of the coast shall at any rate have the same machinery of Church government. The type of machinery is familiar to us in Ireland and works well here: it might at first sight seem too democratic for backward races just emerging from the Neolithic and Bronze ages, but we are assured that it has been tested and proved efficient in the adjacent diocese of Uganda. The parish is the unit. Each parish is represented by the parochial council. This council consists of the minister and lay representatives of the local Church. It is more than a vestry; for it controls the Catechumenate, the Baptismal roll and the Communicant roll, and it inflicts discipline where necessary.

Questions of more than parochial significance are to be handled by the District Council. We have here the counterpart of our Diocesan Synod. All ministers are *ipso facto* members of it, and its lay members are elected by the parochial councils. It meets twice a year, and its functions are to establish new mission stations, to guard the purity of doctrine, the due administration of the Sacraments and the maintenance of discipline.

We next find, corresponding roughly to our General Synod, the Representative Council of the Federated Societies. This piece of machinery claims special atten-

* See *Kikuyu Conference*, § 21.

tion, for its own sake and for the sake of the Archbishop's remarks about it.⁵ Sympathetically but firmly he lays his finger upon it and says in effect, "There the signatories at Kikuyu were *ultra vires*." The reason is obvious. This Council is the keystone of the Constitution. It locks together the various districts and gives cohesion to the whole structure. In doing that it removes the proposed Scheme from the category of co-operation, and places it in that of organic union. To co-operate is within the competence of the missionary diocese, to unite is not. This council is composed entirely of Europeans. Delegates are sent to it from each district according to the number of missionaries in the district. A rough computation as to its *personnel* may be of interest. Take the official list of attendances at the Kikuyu Conference. If, as is probable, those figures represent the strength of the societies concerned, the Representative Council should comprise five Churchmen, two Presbyterians, five from the African Inland Mission, one Methodist and one or two others. The Council is to meet annually. It is not only advisory but executive.

It will be comparatively easy to set up this machinery, but to set it going and to keep it going will be hard. On paper the organization looks simple, neat and complete; but when one reviews the tasks before it, it seems almost bound to break down. The Representative Council especially will be confronted by a series of intricate problems that would tax the powers of a staff of experts. We may group these difficulties under three heads according as they relate to the home societies, the District Councils or the Native Church.

(1) In relation to the missionary societies at home. The allegiance of the missionaries in East Africa will be divided. They will draw their policy from one source

⁵ *Kikuyu*, p. 22f.

and their salaries from another. Further, there must be some, if only slight, doctrinal disagreements. For no one of the home societies will be in full doctrinal sympathy with the Federation. Even if there were no clash of doctrine, mere administration will give rise to difficulty enough. There are numerous questions of practical policy decided, as things are now, by home committees, which the Representative Council would claim to settle, if the Federation Scheme materialized. Such difficulties are anticipated by the proposers of the Scheme, as the following extract from the Resolutions of Conference will shew: "That in all cases of local dispute between Missionary Societies and Churches, the matter be referred for settlement to a Court of Arbitration, consisting of representatives of five of the principal Societies in the Federation, but that their decisions shall not be final, if they involve a question of missionary policy, until the matter shall have been referred to the Societies concerned." All is well if the Society endorses the finding of the Court of Arbitration: but if not, whose will is to prevail? The Resolutions leave us in doubt. The deadlock would probably pose even the English genius for working the unworkable.

(2) In relation to the District Councils. On the one hand it is laid down that "each Society joining the Federation shall be autonomous within its own sphere"; on the other hand we are told that "the function of the Representative Council is to manage affairs until such time as the Native Church can do that for itself." To combine central government with devolution of authority is always difficult; and with divergences of doctrine and ritual lurking in the background the difficulty is increased tenfold. To adjust the balance between the Representative and the District Councils would be an extremely delicate operation. The Resolutions of Conference do not attempt it. In a word, the Representative Council, the voice and hand of the Federation, must be

supreme, or all pretence at unity is abandoned : yet if it is supreme, the autonomy of the Society is merely nominal.

The case that chiefly concerns Church people is the relation of the Representative Council to the Church district. It is of the essence of the Kikuyu proposals that the Church should not occupy a position of privilege. She is simply one amongst several members of a Federation. Yet the closing words of the Resolutions of Conference sound quite another note. They are, "provided that nothing in this constitution of the Federated Missions shall be so understood as to prejudice the Episcopal jurisdiction of the Bishops over all members of their own Communion." Surely there is a glaring inconsistency here. The proviso asserts the authority of the Bishop of Mombasa over Churchmen in non-Church districts. It puts our Church in a position of privilege. A Churchman resident, say, in a Baptist district, if he takes advantage of this privilege, will obey his Bishop and follow the practices of the Church, but if loyal to the spirit of the Federation he must do as the Baptists do, *e.g.*, receive Communion from the Baptist minister and not have his children baptized till they are grown up. The same applies all round : it would be next to impossible to be loyal to both, to one's denomination and to the Federation.

(3) In relation to the Native Church of the future. We can make automata. Living things must be generated. It is a law of life. We may bring together all the material elements of the living thing : yet the *élan de vie* is lacking, and the result is a more or less plausible imitation of life. The Kikuyu Scheme resembles laboratory experiments in the artificial production of life. The Federation has undertaken as its primary task the synthetic production of a spiritual organism. There is vision, there is faith behind the venture. It is a constructive policy : there is a fine touch of imagination in

the idea of this Federation acting foster-mother to an infant Church, and then retiring from the scene when the Church is mature enough to take into its own hands the reins of government. But the nobility of the enterprise must not blind us to the immense difficulties attending its execution. One practical difficulty at the outset is the mere time and thought needed. How can all these Councils be worked efficiently? We have not many reapers in the field, and those there are have their time and strength taxed to the utmost already by their evangelistic labours. Should they spare the time, could they compass the detachment necessary to prosecute such a Herculean task?

We will indicate some of the tasks awaiting the Representative Council. It has to prescribe a common attitude towards various heathen customs and a uniform moral standard for converts: it must enact provisions against "sheep-stealing" and the playing off of one mission against another: it must set forth a "Form of Common Prayer" and popularize it in Public Worship throughout the different districts. It must draw up a common course of instruction for catechumens. These are indirect methods of securing for the future a unity unattainable in the present. The direct method is to capture the Native Ministry for the Federation ideals. The Native Ministry will eventually determine the character of the Native Church. The main task then before the Representative Council is to secure a native clergy doctrinally all of one type. This object they hope to attain by making all candidates for the ministry pass the same course of instruction and subscribe the fundamental provisions of the Federation. Thus the African clergy will all be Federation men, passed through the same mill and stamped with the same hall-mark.

This is easier said than done. It is just possible that the Council might secure general agreement to a Catechumenate course. But a common course of study

for candidates for the ministry is another story. The "minimum of dogma" policy cannot succeed here. Is it likely that Churchmen, Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists with the best intentions in the world will be able to agree on a course of instruction for Divinity Students? Church history and dogma present insuperable difficulties. Controversial points could only be avoided by a superficial syllabus. Those who are to lead the thought of others must receive definite instruction: otherwise in place of Historic Christianity we shall have a milk and water Theism.

Now suppose the Council surmounted all these difficulties: suppose the syndicate Divinity School with its uniform curriculum were established. There still remains a rock on which more than one reunion venture has made shipwreck. At the Conference with its high tide of enthusiasm the rock was hardly seen, but now at the ebb its jagged edges appear. It is a question which, in fairness both to Church people and to other Christian bodies, must be settled, and settled at the outset. Kikuyu glossed it over, postponed the answer, left it to the chances of the future. What is to be the character of the Native Ministry and through it of the African Church we are asked to join in establishing? Is it to be episcopal or non-episcopal? On this grave question the Scheme itself is silent, and the supporters of the Scheme speak with uncertain sound. Official statements and private interpretations seem at variance. Bishop Willis stated privately to the Bishop of Zanzibar, so the latter tells us, that it was understood at the Conference that if the new Native Church were to be non-episcopal the Church Missionary Society could not join it. This statement is capable of more than one interpretation. But, however interpreted, it does not give us any satisfactory assurances. We cannot build on tacit understandings. We claim a guarantee. What steps did Churchmen at the Kikuyu Conference take to ensure the

episcopacy of the African Church? The answer is, "so far as appears, no steps." Episcopacy is a great barrier against disunion: it is of the *bene esse* of the Church at home: much more is this true of the child races who need the paternal hand of a "Father in God." All Church people would agree in this confession. But where does it shew in the records of the Kikuyu Conference? Plenty of detailed resolutions about the future Church, but not a hint as to its episcopacy. Regulations for admission to Holy Communion are laid down: not a word is said of Confirmation, an episcopal prerogative. Provision in detail is made for the Native Ministry: but there is no hint at any but the one order. Bishop Weston says he could not help concluding that Bishop Willis and he were using words in different senses. Another possible explanation of the discrepancy would shew the Scheme more wise than candid. The Scheme is silent about episcopacy: yet its champion holds that it will establish an episcopal system. It looks like an attempt to smuggle. Perhaps the true account of the matter is that the consent of the non-episcopal bodies at Kikuyu could not have been secured then to a constitution frankly episcopal: but that once the Federation was formed, they might be induced to give episcopacy a trial.

Probably no party is disposed to give the Federation *carte blanche* in this matter. Church and non-Church, we all want to know beforehand how the land lies. The only hope of avoiding future recriminations is to thrash the subject out now and have an explicit understanding about it. Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, whatever the native Church is to be, let it be set down in black and white that we may know where we stand.

Often in the history of God's dealings with man we find the original divine plans thwarted and subsequent modifications introduced to meet the new situation. If this truth were kept in sight, there would be much less perplexity and heartburning about reunion. No doubt

Christ intended His Church to be one outwardly : but the original plan has been thwarted, and it is our wisdom to admit the fact and to be loyal to the modified plan. To argue " our Founder meant us to be one organization, therefore unity is to-day attainable " is not permissible. It is to tread the old high *a priori* road to do so, and in this case may lead the student of the Kikuyu Scheme into despair. He will feel that if this Scheme fails, none can succeed. That is probably the truth of the matter. The Kikuyu Conference was led by the *a priori* argument into attempting the impossible. Under Government pressure the Conference adopted the principle of territorial division and its corollary the Federation, and thus turned a salutary and practicable system of co-operation into the impracticable scheme we have been considering. The East African Christians of the different denominations should surely do now what we at home do and what other parts of the mission field do ; *i.e.*, agree to differ, to seek the same goal along different roads. That is the true basis for Mission comity. On that foundation there is plenty of room for a working arrangement that shall not compromise the parent bodies nor fetter their successors in the mission field. An Entente may succeed where an Alliance would fail.

The Kikuyu Scheme, if a failure, is at any rate a splendid failure. This essay has been mainly occupied in exhibiting its weak points, partly because its merits are so obvious that they call for no appreciation, and partly because criticism seemed the need of the hour. Public attention has been concentrated on the doings and sayings of the protagonists : the reaction of Kikuyu on our party questions at home has been eagerly canvassed, and the Scheme itself uncritically lauded or uncritically condemned. The only really fruitful topic of discussion is the merits and demerits of the actual proposals. Those who think the *cons* outweigh the *pros* must say so, and say so in the

form of criticism. Many of us would wish that the Federation might at least have a trial. Unfortunately experiments of the sort are too hazardous. No reversion to the *status quo* is possible, once a beginning is made. Ventures in Church polity are like military enterprises. If entered upon, they must be carried through, or disaster ensues. So here, our responsibilities to the African Church debar us from making East Africa the *corpus vile* of our experiments in reunion.

A. A. LUCE.