

THE GREAT DIVORCE AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHILDREN

An Investigation concerning the effects of the "Dis-Union" of 1925 on the Foreign Mission Fields of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

by Zander Dunn

On June 10, 1925 the United Church of Canada came into existence. Into this new Canadian ecclesiastical ecumenical experiment entered the Methodist Church, the Congregational Church and approximately two-thirds of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The Methodist and Congregational bodies had very little difficulty in bringing almost all their members into the Union. With the Presbyterians it was an entirely different story. The Presbyterians who entered the union believed that the Presbyterian Church in Canada had entered that union as a body. But those who refused to join the United Church of Canada considered themselves the true Presbyterians and viewed their former colleagues as having left the faith to join a new Church. The "continuing Presbyterians", as the Presbyterians who remained out of the union were called, thought not in terms of "union" but in terms of "dis-union" when they beheld the remnants of the post-1925 Presbyterian Church in Canada.¹

Dr. Ephraim Scott, editor of the Presbyterian Record, one of the strongest anti-unionists and the moderator of the "continuing" Presbyterian Church in 1925, expressed the sentiments of the non-concurring Presbyterians when he wrote:

Our good ship, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, has had, for over fifty years, its official log-book, the Presbyterian Record, to record its work

and progress from month till month.

In June, 1925, a year ago, some of the crew left this ship. To their leaving there was no objection. But in doing so they attempted to sink her and attempted also to seize and carry off her log-book, and whatever else they could take from the ship, and for a little time all effort by local hands on board was devoted to the saving of the ship.

The monthly 'log' for June, 1925, was not written up and published till towards the end of that month when the crisis was safely past and the good ship, with never a beam broken, nor a bolt loosed, nor a plank started, nor a timber strained, and with a loyal, happy crew, was once more fairly on her way.²

The crew was loyal but certainly not happy for the once great Presbyterian Church in Canada, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, was completely disrupted. The United Church of Canada might rejoice over the "union" but the Presbyterian Church in Canada could only lament the "dis-union".

While Ephraim Scott saw the Presbyterian Church as a ship, much lighter in 1925 because of the departure of the mutinous crew members, the Presbyterian Church after the "dis-union" can also be viewed as a family suffering the problems of working out the arrangements for a divorce. The parents in this analogy are the two sides of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The children are the overseas mission fields to which they gave birth. There were eight "children" in the "family" - Trinidad, born in 1868, Formosa, 1872; Central India, 1877; British Guiana, 1885; North China, 1888; Korea, 1898; South China, 1901; Gwalior, in India, 1904.³

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the

settlement that the divorced parents made concerning the children. And it is the thesis of this paper that, as is the case in most divorce proceedings, the decisions concerning the welfare and future of the children were made by the parents with no word from the children. In other words, the decisions as to which foreign mission fields of the Presbyterian Church in Canada should be awarded to the continuing Presbyterian Church and which should be awarded to the United Church were made in Canada, by Canadians, influenced by Canadians abroad with almost no reference to the desires of the "native" churches. There is no record that any overseas "native" church body was consulted - probably because few of the churches had structures which allowed the "native" churches to express themselves in any meaningful way but also because the Canadians, on both sides of the conflict, did not think it any of the natives' business.⁴

Lest the reader think that this is bad historiography because the involvement of the "native" churches was not an issue in those days he should know that one of the guiding principles the unionists set for themselves in any attempt to divide the fields was that the rights of the "native" church in each field would be taken into consideration.⁵

Not only does the lack of evidence concerning the participation by the overseas "native" churches implicitly support the thesis but the documentation on the Canadian side explicitly bears out the argument that the divorce proceedings were the exclusive undertaking of the "parents" while the "children"

had no say as to which "parent" they would be assigned.

THE PROBLEM

It is not the purpose of this paper to rehash the Church Union Controversy in Canada but one cannot understand the problems with which this paper deals without some reference to it. As we have seen the controversy was the concern of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. For the two decades prior to 1925 the Church had debated the matter through the courts, in sermons, on paper, over the air and had even had two very inconclusive nation-wide votes on the issue. As the date drew closer for a final decision as to whether the Presbyterian Church in Canada should enter a new church with the Methodists and Congregationalists the Unionists and the anti-Unionists prepared for battle because it became increasingly clear that the Church was deeply divided.

The anti-Unionists were afraid that by giving their money to the General Assembly Budget of the Presbyterian Church in Canada before 1925 they would be supporting the Unionists who controlled the chief offices in the Church. They also feared that if the majority decided to enter the Church Union the anti-Unionists would lose what money they had given to the Church and would have no funds with which to carry on the "continuing" Presbyterian Church.

By 1923 the anti-Unionists were crippling the overseas missions work of the Presbyterian Church in Canada by withholding their donations to the Budget of the General Assembly. The overseas missions received a certain percentage of the

General Assembly Budget and when donations fell the foreign fields suffered.

Other factors also combined to hurt the overseas work. During and after the First World War the cost of living in Canada and overseas had skyrocketed. To keep missionaries on the fields special grants to them had to be made. The exchange rates, especially in China, were astronomical and cut the value of the Canadian dollar in half. During the war the Church in Canada had not had to support a number of missionaries who had joined the army. But at the end of hostilities the missionaries, most of whom were from China and India, wanted to return to their fields. The Presbyterian Church felt it had a moral obligation to reassign them to their former fields, not only because the missionaries wanted to return but because they were needed. It was expected that at the end of the war great possibilities would open up and many workers already saw "the fields white unto harvest" lacking only the necessary "laborers". Along with these expenses went the increased cost of transportation to the faraway lands. In addition, after the war the people of the Presbyterian Church in Canada had not increased their givings to the Church by very much.⁶ All these factors combined to produce an oppressive debt, in 1922, of over \$166,000 on the books of the Foreign Mission Board alone.⁷ One report claimed that "in 1924 the Foreign Mission Fields were handicapped for workers, for equipment and for funds. As a Church we were trying to carry on a work which required \$750,000 with less than \$500,000 contributed."⁸ The financial

boycott by the anti-Unionists worked only too well in 1924 as far as the overseas work was concerned.

Sum total received was \$463,561.78, a shortage on appropriation of \$36,438.22, and of the \$463,561 the W.M.S. contributed \$49,475 and there was taken from the reserve fund \$97,956.85, so that from the Church at large there was received only \$316,130.87. The call from the Foreign Field in 1924 and for several years preceding was 'Send us more missionaries and more funds.'⁹

Although the Rev. A.E. Armstrong, Assistant Secretary for Overseas Missions, wrote, "There is a very sincere desire on the part of most of those opposed to Union to stand by our missionary work in the meantime"¹⁰ he and Dr. R.P. MacKay, the Secretary of Overseas Missions, later concluded that the \$100,000 which they had heard the continuing Presbyterians were trying to raise to fight legal battles could only be realized at the expense of home and overseas missions work. In another letter to all mission fields Dr. MacKay warned that no new appointments could be made and that financial reductions would have to be implemented. He concluded bitterly, "That is what comes of our Union negotiations."¹¹

The lack of money caused discouragement and upset on the foreign fields. Financial stringency even forced some of the Mission Councils on the overseas fields to send some of their members back to Canada. The situation in British Guiana is a good example. In 1923 the Mission Council, which had drawn up a budget of \$40,000 was informed by Canada that it would have to operate on a budget of \$30,000. The Council adjusted to that without too many complaints. But when in 1924 it was cut back twice to a budget of \$26,000, of which

only \$19,400 was to come from Canada, the Mission Council was in trouble. The British Guiana Mission Council, like every Mission Council pared the budget as far as possible. But it was not enough. A missionary and his wife had to be sent home to Canada in order to allow the Council to function on its reduced allocation.¹²

These troubles only confirmed the Unionists in their belief that union was the only answer. They saw the anti-Unionists as opposed to overseas missions and disrupting the Church at home as well as abroad. The anti-Unionists, on the other hand, felt the Unionists were selling the great Presbyterian Church in Canada for a mess of pottage. Some of them felt that the Presbyterian Church in Canada still had work to do but that the Unionists were wrecking the Church on some unproven idea of union.

There is no doubt where the majority of the overseas missionaries stood in relation to the Church union question. By a great majority they were for Church union in Canada and abroad. In Honan, with a staff of 33 men, 30 wives and 30 single women only Dr. and Mrs. Goforth were opposed to the Church union and they were in Canada on furlough. In South China, out of a staff of 8 men, 8 wives and 8 single women, five were against union but only one was remaining on the field. In Formosa, with a staff of 7 men, 7 wives and 10 single women only Mr. and Mrs. George W. MacKay spoke against the union. In Korea, where 17 men, 15 wives and 17 single women worked, five couples refused to vote for union, includ-

ing the Rev. Luther Young and his wife. In central India all of the staff of 28 men, 28 wives and 33 single women concurred in plans for union except for Dr. and Mrs. John Buchanan, Miss Bertha Robson and the Rev. and Mrs. D.E. MacDonald. Trinidad, with 9 men, 6 wives and 5 single women had no anti-Unionists. British Guiana's entire staff of 5 men, 4 wives and one single woman were concurring although Dr. James Cropper said he would work with the continuing Presbyterians if necessary. The only field in which the majority were non-concurring was the Gwalior field in India (the smallest overseas field) with 3 men, 3 wives and 2 single women. The two single women were pro-unionists.¹³

Why did the majority of the missionaries favor Church union? The reasons are not hard to find. The missionaries were men of their age - an age of liberal theology which was characterized by the "social gospel". The concern in all the churches was for the needs of people, not for the niceties of professions of faith. Theological differences were glossed over as men tried to co-operate in preaching and enacting the gospel. The missionaries saw denominationalism as a divisive influence and considered it irrelevant and harmful on the mission field. As Armstrong put it:

There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that the greatest hindrance to the progress of Christ's gospel in non-Christian lands is our many divisions. From every missionary land this complaint and protest comes to us.¹⁴

The missionaries believed that the church would be much stronger if it would stop competing and start co-operating

overseas. The missionaries deplored the terrible waste of men, money and material when these things were duplicated by denominations in the same area. The missionaries in Central India wrote:

The more we have been brought into contact with the needs of the great world, the more thin and artificial have seemed the partitions which divided the different bodies of Christ's followers from one another, and the more wasteful and inefficient has appeared the overlapping which is the inevitable concomitant of narrow denominationalism.¹⁵

If the missionaries of India (where there was no Methodist or Congregational work under Canadian auspices) felt this way then we can be sure that the missionaries of the China fields (where the Canadian Methodists were strong) would agree. Also, the Presbyterian missionaries thought that more money might become available to them for their work if they joined with the Methodists and Congregationalists.

When the United Church came into being the Christian Century exulted:

Put down a new monumental date in ecclesiastical history - Wednesday, June 10, 1925. On that day took place the first large-scale achievement of organic union of separate denominational families since the Protestant Reformation.¹⁶

Professor A.A. Scott, of India concurred in that evaluation of the event and probably spoke for the majority of the missionaries.

When we tell you that we consider the Union which was consummated on June 10 as the greatest and most glorious event in Canadian Church History and indeed one of the greatest events in the history of the entire Church it will be quite clear to you where we stand in the matter of Church union.¹⁷

And on that great day in June all the overseas mission fields of the Presbyterian Church in Canada automatically went into the United Church of Canada under the terms of the United Church of Canada Act.

Immediately the continuing Presbyterians in Canada demanded that some of the fields be assigned to them. They not only regarded the United Church Act as an autocratic and illegal piece of legislation but they considered it very unfair that no overseas fields were given to them. And there were some very strong-willed missionaries who demanded to be part of the Presbyterian Church. Negotiations, with a view to getting some of the fields, were carried on between the continuing Presbyterian Church leaders in Canada and the anti-Unionist missionaries. Of course this greatly annoyed the Foreign Mission Board executive who had gone into the United Church. For example A.E. Armstrong, the former Assistant Secretary of Overseas Missions of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and who continued on in that position in the United Church of Canada, wrote to the Central India Mission Council complaining "that correspondence has been indulged in by missionaries in the Southern Bhil Field with Anti-Unionists in the Church in Canada, which seems to have been looking towards the carrying out of an apparent desire to have that area."¹⁸ Armstrong firmly believed that the Presbyterian Church had entered the United Church and all correspondence from foreign fields should go through the United Church structures. Therefore, he could write:

The Mission Council should know that non-concurring missionaries who wish to continue their services in that work would be expected to regard it as part of their loyalty to the Mission and the Boards that they discontinue such correspondence, and leave it to negotiations in Canada should any proposals be made for the transfer of that district.¹⁹

It should be noted here that Armstrong says negotiations concerning the future of the mission should be left to the Canadian bodies and makes no reference to native churches.

The Rev. John Buchanan, the missionary referred to on the Southern Bhil field and an anti-Unionist, replied indignantly:

You will see that as an anti-Unionist I am ordered to discontinue correspondence with anti-Unionists (nearly half of the old Presbyterian Church, my wife one of them) on the subject of what is to be done to save the Southern Bhil Field in the Vindhia Mountains of Central India, where we were appointed in 1895 i.e. thirty years ago. Is that the unpardonable sin? Is that Christian democracy?²⁰

One can sympathize with Dr. Buchanan, to some extent, for his whole working life had been invested in the Bhil field and because of his convictions he could not be expected to remain loyal to the Foreign Mission Board which he considered had betrayed him and the Church. His loyalty was to the one third of the Presbyterians who continued to present, what he considered, the true Presbyterian witness.

THE NEGOTIATIONS

The Dominion Properties Commission was set up in Canada to settle the legal, financial and material issues about which the United Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church disagreed - often with unChristian vehemence. It was

also charged with the responsibility of dividing the various overseas mission fields between the two churches. The Commission had so much work to do in Canada alone and it knew so little about the overseas fields that it despaired of ever working out an equitable settlement. But the leaders of the overseas departments of the two churches were confident that they could reach an agreement which the Dominion Properties Commission could easily approve. The continuing Presbyterians suggested that "The Foreign Mission question, if amicably settled by us, will save the Federal Commission much worry and time, our Churches much expense, and the Foreign Mission cause much harm."²¹ The Commission, pleased that they would be relieved of that extra burden and encouraged by the spirit of co-operation and good-will which characterized the negotiations between the leaders of the foreign missions work, told the two overseas committees to proceed to a settlement.

Perhaps it was because Dr. Andrew S. Grant of the Presbyterian Church and the Rev. A.E. Armstrong of the United Church had never visited any of the overseas fields, and therefore had no personal stake in them, that they were able to decide so amicably the fate of the fields. Certainly their correspondence shows a mutual respect and a common concern that the settlement be made as quickly and as fairly as possible. They both felt that the work was more important than the matter as to who was to manage it and they often expressed their support for overseas fields and for those who worked them whether they were Unionists or anti-Unionists. In fact

their solicitude was often misunderstood. If they referred to "our" missions in their letters they could be sure of a reply from some missionary indignant that he or she had been grouped with the other party. Typical of this attitude is a letter Dr. Grant and the Rev. N.H. McGillivray received from the Rev. J.T. Taylor of Central India. "You address us as 'our missionaries', a statement frequently repeated in your letter. We are missionaries of the United Church of Canada."²²

At the beginning there was a difference in approach between the United Church and the Presbyterian Church to the question of what should be done with the foreign fields. The United Church suggested that the two boards should co-operate in the same fields. The anti-Union missionaries would be supported and directed by the Presbyterians in Canada, the Unionist missionaries would be supported and directed by the United Church. Both types of missionaries would work side-by-side in their common tasks. In this way the least possible dislocation to the work would result. Armstrong wrote to Grant:

Let me say personally that I would like to see the principle of co-operation between the two Boards tried out in some field.... I am sure that when the present feeling on the part of some in Canada dies away as it inevitably must, it will be found that there will be no difficulty at all in co-operation, and especially on mission fields where there is no such feeling existing between those who are Unionist and those who are non-concurring.²³

The Presbyterians, on the other hand, wanted to have their own separate fields of work. They distrusted any co-operative schemes because they knew that their missionaries could always be outvoted and they thought their money might

get siphoned off to support the Unionist endeavors.²⁴ They honestly believed that they were capable of supporting their own mission fields. In 1926, after the losses of the "dis-union", they declared:

We are today one of the strongest branches of world-wide Presbyterianism.... Our membership strength today is well over the 150,000 mark and our budget for the year calls for an expenditure of \$600,000. In five years time, from January 1, 1927, we believe our budget will be \$1,000,000 a year, nearly equal to what it was before the dis-union.²⁵

The United Church, by 1926, realized that there was very little possibility of co-operation on the mission field with the Presbyterians. They stated, therefore, that "the Board is quite willing, and indeed anxious to transfer any section of the work for which the non-concurring Church can provide staff."²⁵ But the United Church leaders were confident that the Presbyterian Church could not raise enough staff to take over more than one or two of the smaller fields. When the Rev. N.A. MacEachern was reported to have claimed that there were forty-seven non-concurring missionaries remaining with the Presbyterian Church and that "the next General Assembly will see the Presbyterians covering such a wide scope of mission work as will challenge that being carried on by any other church in Canada or elsewhere", Armstrong responded, "we do not know of even twenty who are available for them, unless they count certain missionaries who are not available, though non-concurring."²⁶

On the other hand, the Presbyterians were equally

confident that they could raise and support a large mission staff. When they finally decided which fields they wanted they calculated they would require

a staff of 73 workers and 34 wives. To get these workers there are several sources. (1) Our own missionaries as already at work on the field. (2) Others on the field who would work under us, if the fields were granted to us, and have so declared themselves. We could mention names, but refrain from doing so. (3) Other workers serving outside our own Church altogether, who have expressed a desire to help us in our Foreign Mission work. (4) Volunteers from our own land who have already declared themselves, and more are ready to do so as soon as fields are definitely appointed to our Church.²⁷

The Presbyterians felt able to support such a large staff because

We are stronger for Foreign Mission work now than ever before, because owing to conditions over which we had no control much Home Mission work has passed out of our hands, and so we have greater strength for Foreign Mission work. Before disunion many congregations in Ontario were responsible for the full salaries of certain missionaries. The majority of these congregations voted to remain Presbyterian and are willing to repeat their support of special missionaries.²⁸

Therefore, the Presbyterians asked the United Church to assign to the Presbyterian Church the Gwalior and Bhil fields of Central India, the South China field, British Guiana, Formosa and Korea. This would have left the United Church with the large Honan field, the greater part of the Central India field and Trinidad.

The only two fields which were never discussed were Gwalior and Trinidad. Gwalior had been founded in 1904 under the leadership of the fiery John Wilkie who had split off from

his brethren in the Indore mission of Central India because of a disagreement on policy. The mission came under the wing of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1918 but continued to be dominated by the flinty Wilkie. When Wilkie and the two other couples on the field stood with the Presbyterian Church in Canada the United Church was glad to be rid of him and immediately gave the field to the Presbyterians. Trinidad had always been considered a Union stronghold since 1910 when

Dr. Morton moved a resolution (which was so unanimously passed that no discussion was held) "That this Presbytery approve of the Union of Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Canada on the basis reached by the joint committee and adopted by the General Assembly.'29

As we have seen the missionaries of Trinidad voted unanimously for union in 1925. At no time did the Presbyterians ask for Trinidad and at no time was it offered to them by the United Church. In fact the United Church never offered any field to the Presbyterians. It only offered to discuss the possibility of the transfer of various fields or parts of fields to the Presbyterians. For example, in response to the Presbyterian request, the United Church stated that it was prepared to discuss the possibility of transferring British Guiana, the San Ui and Kwong Moon districts of South China, some parts of Korea, and was open to discuss the problems of India and offered to consider co-operative work in Formosa.³⁰

The Presbyterians demanded British Guiana because they wanted a Caribbean field. They argued that the fields overseas should be divided on the basis of the strength of

the Church at home and on that basis the Trinidad field would go to the United Church and the British Guiana field would go to the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians could say this because they believed:

The Church overseas belongs not to the missionaries, but to the Church at home, therefore, the Foreign Mission assets are the property of the home Church and in the final analysis, the problem of Foreign Missions is the problem of the home Church.³¹

The United Church felt quite differently. They had been shocked by the number of Presbyterians who refused to enter the union and did not want to lose that proportion of the overseas work. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of the missionaries were Unionists and the United Church felt their wishes should be largely influential in any settlement.

But before the two overseas boards could meet to decide on the various fields a document arrived from the Mission Council in British Guiana which virtually assured the Presbyterians of that Field. In a long statement the missionaries of British Guiana reaffirmed their Unionist sentiments but indicated their willingness to turn the field over to the Presbyterians. "We feel constrained," they said, "to face the thought that the non-concurring church should be given, as an act of Christian fellowship and generosity, some share in the Foreign Mission work built up by the whole church."³² They realised that it would be very difficult for the United Church to hand over any other field besides Gwalior because the large majority of missionaries in all the fields were Unionists. Therefore, the missionaries of British Guiana felt obliged to

ask

in the hope of conciliation, whether it may not be our duty, from a sense of Christian generosity, and in the spirit of sacrifice, if this Mission may not be given over with less hardship to the Mission concerned than any other and thus to express to the United Church our readiness to concur in such action, if after due consideration of all the interests involved such a course be thought admissable by the United Board? There are not very many missionaries here and of these Dr. Cropper is willing to continue his life service with the non-concurring church, if this mission be assigned to them. The problem of language is not so serious here, as in the fields of India or China and therefore the non-concurring Church should be able at an earlier date to man the work with their own missionaries.³³

When Armstrong received this statement he wrote to Grant that the way was now open for a transfer of that entire field to the Presbyterian Church. Ironically, the Presbyterians, who had argued that the problem of foreign missions should be decided, not by the missionaries, but by the home Church, received Gwalior and British Guiana because of the decisions of the Canadian missionaries in those fields, none of whom took much account of the feelings of the "native" churches.

As for Korea the Executive of the Korean Mission Council wrote in January 1926 that they had agreed unanimously in regard to the participation of the Board of the non-concurring Presbyterian Church in the work in Korea, that the field should not be divided and that it should remain in the United Church. If the Presbyterian Board wanted to work in Korea it could send funds or support a certain number of workers. Later, after further consideration the missionaries of Korea

suggested that non-concurring Presbyterians could take over the Lungchingsun district in Manchuria. Armstrong explained the decision:

The Mission is all the more desirous of seeing this transfer made because not only do they want to have your Church continue to share in the work which the Presbyterian Church in Canada built up, but they know that the United Church is not able to grant funds necessary to care adequately for the work, and therefore they see a way by which the work can be better cared for, if you take part of it.³⁴

The non-concurring missionaries said they would continue to work with the United Church, if necessary, for a time at least. But the Presbyterians in Canada insisted that they have the entire field, or nothing.

It was the same story in South China. The United Church offered to transfer the districts of San Ui including Kwong Moon but stipulated that the whole field would be under one Mission Council. The Presbyterians again insisted that "they must have an absolutely independent Mission they can call their own."³⁵

This seems to be about as far as the bargaining ever got concerning these two fields. The United Church did not feel it could turn over these fields against the wishes of the missionaries there. In fact, on the United Church side "the missionaries [were] the determining factor.... In every field missionaries have stood by their guns and have not been tempted by any allurements submitted to them. They recognized, with few exceptions, the trend of the times the world over."³⁶

The Bhil field in India where Dr. John Buchanan held

forth was only one part of the large Central India field. Buchanan was a strong anti-Unionist and wanted to remain in his area and work under the Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterians argued that they should get that district as a separate field because the Bhils were a separate race within the Central India area and the district was a distinct entity in itself. They felt certain they could man the field well.

The United Church argued that the field should remain with them in the Central India area so that the Bhils could be brought closer to their Indian brothers. To put them in a separate mission would be to slow their integration into the greater India. The Rev. J.R. Harcourt was particularly concerned. He said:

To make any distinction between the Bhils and the other races of India in our Christian work, or even to appear to do so, is something that should never be laid at the door of our Church in Canada. It is a problem that we should help the Indian Church to fight out and allow them to solve for themselves. The terrible task facing the Indian Church of Race and Caste and their Unity in Christ should not be added to by any further divisions among ourselves or the work to which we have set our hands.³⁷

The missionaries in India were also concerned that if the field were legally handed over to the Presbyterians the Indian potentates would either oppose the move or would simply take over the land before the proper legal transactions could be effected. The missionaries were greatly annoyed because "the claim for such a division is all due to the request of one man, who at best cannot have many more years of service in the country."³⁸ That one man, Dr. Buchanan, was the key to

the final surrender of the field to the Presbyterians. The Mission Council were unanimous in their decision that the field should not be given to the Presbyterians (obviously Buchanan was not at the meeting) but it became Presbyterian largely, one suspects, because Buchanan refused to move. Moreover, the United Church knew they had to give up something. The Presbyterians had only Gwalior and British Guiana, the two smallest fields. The Bhil district was another small item. It would have to go to the Presbyterians.

The Bhil field is linked to the Formosan field insofar as their fates were decided together. When the Mission Council in Formosa was asked by the Foreign Mission Board of the United Church if they would be willing to work under the Presbyterian Church the Mission Council replied that that field "should remain in its entirety a Mission of the United Church of Canada."³⁹ But that was before Mr. George W. MacKay, the son of the founder of the Mission, the Rev. Dr. George Leslie MacKay, proposed a plan of co-operation whereby the Presbyterians would support him and various other aspects of the work. The United Church, even as late as August, 1926, did not feel they could veto such a scheme even though they knew the Presbyterians wanted the whole of Formosa. The next thing we read in the correspondence files is a letter from Armstrong to Grant reporting that the United Church Foreign Mission Board, at a meeting on September 16, had decided to comply with the Presbyterian Church offer to consider the question of the division of the foreign fields closed if the

Presbyterian Church in Canada received British Guiana, Gwalior and the Bhil fields in India and the entire Formosa field.⁴⁰

What happened between August 5 and September 20 is explained by Armstrong in a long letter to Miss Jane M. Kinney, secretary of the Formosa Mission Council. August was a holiday month so no meetings were held. On September 11 Grant and McGillivray of the Presbyterian Church Board submitted their modified proposal requesting British Guiana, Gwalior, the Bhil district and Formosa. The United Church Board met on September 14, a subcommittee met on September 15 and a decision was made on September 16 to accept the offer. This haste, which prevented the United Church from consulting with the missionaries involved, was necessary in order to obtain the approval of the Dominion Properties Commission which was meeting on September 20. If the two churches had not come up with a plan to divide the overseas fields by that date the Commission would have had to step in and make the decisions for them.⁴¹ The United Church wanted to avoid that for as Armstrong put it:

It was the feeling among those who are in a position to know that if we had not arrived at an agreement it is possible that the Commission would have ordered more property to be transferred to the Presbyterian Church than the twenty-nine per cent of the overseas property which is being transferred with the areas given to the Presbyterians.⁴²

The United Church also felt that it was only fair to give the Presbyterian Church a field in the Orient. They had been unable to decide on Korea or China and the Presbyterian Church with fields only in India and British Guiana needed Formosa

for balance. Armstrong added "It seemed wise also to affect an agreement, if possible, in order that we might promote the friendly spirit which you will recognize should characterize both Christian Churches in Canada."⁴³ Evidently the agreement had the desired result for Grant wrote to Armstrong:

I wish to assure you that we appreciate very much the spirit in which these negotiations have been carried on and hope that in the future we will be able mutually to be of help to each other in arranging and carrying on the work in the Foreign Fields without injury to the work in any way, or injustice to the workers.⁴⁴

THE SETTLEMENT

As we have seen the Presbyterian Church emerged from the Church union negotiations with four fields in three countries - British Guiana, Formosa and the Gwalior and Bhil fields in India. One of the most significant aspects of this settlement concerned the leading missionaries in these areas. They shared a number of common characteristics. All were "pioneers". Dr. James Cropper had been the one to restart the work in British Guiana in 1896 ("The foundations of this Mission I laid thirty years ago"); Dr. John Wilkie, after pioneering the work in Indore in 1879, opened the Gwalior field in 1904; Buchanan had been in the Bhil district since 1895; G.W. MacKay was the son of the much revered Dr. G.L. MacKay who had opened Formosa in 1872 and had died in 1902. These were old men, conservative in their theology and in their life-styles. And they all shared a devotion to the Presbyterian Church which, in most cases, made them opposed to the United Church of Canada. Even Dr. Cropper, who claimed he was willing to work with either

church had been suspected by his fellow missionaries of trying to pull wires to get the British Guiana field under the Presbyterian Church before the Union.⁴⁵ It strikes the investigator that for the next few years the Presbyterian work overseas was to be controlled by conservative old men whose best years were behind them and whose negative stand on the Church Union issue was probably the best indication of their attitude to life. We know that all of them were rather difficult to work with. Cropper was accused by one of his comrades of suffering from an "autocracy complex".⁴⁶ Wilkie broke with the Mission Council at Indore after many stormy years and started up his own work in Gwalior.⁴⁷ Buchanan ran his own field and tolerated no criticism by others. (It is significant that after the September 1926 settlement "a cable reached the non-curring Mission Board from Drs. Wilkie and Buchanan in India stating that they declined to accept Dr. Colwell as Unionist missionary."⁴⁸) MacKay was one of the dominating figures in a little circle of people which practically ran the Church in Formosa.⁴⁹

The United Church did a statistical analysis of the overseas fields handed to the Presbyterians in the settlement of 1926. In Formosa, out of a staff of 25, all were Unionists but two. In British Guiana all 12 missionaries were sympathetic toward Church Union. In Central India 87 of the 92 missionaries were Unionists, only 5 being anti-Unionists. Only in Gwalior did the anti-Unionists have a majority - 6 out of 8 missionaries. In other words, according to the United Church,

the Presbyterians inherited a staff of 134 missionaries, 126 of whom were Unionists. The Presbyterians could count only 11 missionaries who were committed to their cause in these fields.⁵⁰ Although these figures indicated the general preponderance of Unionist missionaries in the Presbyterian fields they are an example of how anybody can twist statistics. Take British Guiana for instance. Miss Mabel Anthony, the Rev. and Mrs. George MacLeod and the Rev. and Mrs. Neil Rattee either returned to Canada on furlough shortly after Union or were in Canada during the Union and never returned to British Guiana. Dr. Cropper, although he said he considered himself a United Church minister, had been sympathetic to the Presbyterian cause before Union and afterwards had declared himself willing to work with either church. The Rev. Gibson Fisher was a Unionist but he had been a Methodist and was an Englishman who had been to Canada only once in 1906. What happened in Canada did not really affect him and he continued to work in British Guiana for the Presbyterians until his death in 1933. The Rev. James Scrimgeour, although a strong Unionist, was more concerned to work in British Guiana than to go to a United Church field. He would have remained in British Guiana if he had not had so many bad experiences with people like Mrs. M.C. McKerroll, a hyper-anti-Unionist who, as a member of the Board of Foreign Missions, made Scrimgeour so uncomfortable on his furlough in Canada that he felt he could not return to British Guiana to work under the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board.⁵¹ It is not really accurate, therefore, to say that

all the missionaries of British Guiana were Unionists. They were primarily missionaries to British Guiana and were not particularly interested as to whether they were labelled "antis" or "unionists" and one suspects that many missionaries on other fields felt the same way. The truth is not fully served by dividing all missionaries into two camps. The missionaries' motives were too complex for such a simplistic analysis.

Exception must also be taken to the figures the United Church itemized for Central India. Their figures of 87 Unionists and 5 anti-Unionists out of a total of 92 Missionaries are for the entire Central India field. But as we have seen, the Presbyterians received only the Southern Bhil and West Nimar districts while the rest of the field went to the United Church. Although figures concerning the actual number of missionaries involved in these fields are unknown it is likely that approximately 10 were transferred to the Presbyterian Church. The figures then become something like 45 missionaries in the Presbyterian fields of whom 11 were anti-Unionists.⁵²

The United Church also concluded that the Presbyterians took over only 29% of the total overseas property (including Women's Missionary Society property). It also pointed out that 20% of the total overseas property was in Formosa. The Presbyterians had received one large field and three very small ones. They took an even smaller proportion of the Overseas budget - 19.75% of the foreign Mission Board expenses and only 14% of the Women's Missionary Society expenses abroad.⁵³ No

doubt these figures were marshalled many times to prove the better deal that the United Church had made on the settlement. Armstrong received a number of letters from men and women who had served in Formosa or were related to missionaries there who lamented the loss of so great and good a "child". They all felt the Presbyterians could not possibly man so important an outpost. Armstrong could only reply. "We could not very well question their ability to provide staff for these areas transferred. They assure us that they can do so and we have to accept that as a fact and hope that the passage of the years will see their fulfilling the obligations they are incurring."⁵⁴

This concern for Formosa and the feeling of guilt about how it had been "sold out" to the Presbyterians lingered for a long time among United Churchmen. Dr. Alfred Gandier, Principal of Knox College until 1925, visited Japan, Korea and Formosa as Chairman of the United Church Foreign Mission Board. In his report on that tour he opined that the United Church had treated the missionaries in Formosa badly. When they heard the news of the transfer in Formosa it had hit them like "a bolt out of the blue" because they had never been consulted about the change. The missionaries felt the Church had cast them off. He compared the situation in Formosa to that of Knox College in Toronto.

Just as Knox is the most beautiful and valuable single property the Church has here at home, that is the old Presbyterian Church, and that went as a sacrifice, so in our Formosa Mission we have the most beautiful and valuable property that was

in any single Mission of the Church and we have sacrificed the best and most beautiful thing we have.⁵⁵

Although the United Church gained the bulk of the former Presbyterian overseas work by taking over the fields in China, Korea, Trinidad and Central India (except for the Bhil and West Nimar districts) the secretary of the United Church Foreign Mission Board felt compelled to circulate a memorandum drawn up in November 1926 concerning "the advantages and disadvantages of assigning certain areas abroad to the non-concurring Presbyterian Board of Missions." This memorandum merits close scrutiny for it sums up the thinking of the United Church at that time. There were twelve disadvantages and twelve advantages listed. The disadvantages included:

1. The transfer was bad because the Presbyterian Board was unfamiliar with the history of the work abroad and the methods of work used in the fields.
2. The work could be carried on only if the Unionist missionaries remained in Presbyterian fields.
3. But the Unionist missionaries would not work as well as before because they would disagree with the views of the Presbyterians and they would be trying to leave the fields as soon as possible.
4. It was doubtful if the Presbyterians could get enough qualified missionaries to carry on.
5. The "native" churches would not want to work with the Presbyterians "especially as they have not been consulted

in the matter. (The Indian Churches and Christians in the transferred area in Central India are part of the United Church of India North and have sent a message protesting against the division of their Church)". (emphasis mine.)

6. The "native" Christians would not be happy when the Unionist missionaries, whom they loved, left the land and young, inexperienced missionaries replaced them.
7. The United Church would have to spend money in re-settling the Unionist missionaries.
8. The Formosa and British Guiana missionaries would have to be transferred to new fields and would have to acquire new languages. (Only Scrimgeour, in British Guiana, was transferred to Trinidad where no new language was needed. In Formosa very few missionaries left the work and it is not known that they had to acquire new languages.)
9. It was doubtful that the Presbyterians could adequately finance the work they had received.
10. In Central India the rulers would probably welcome a change of auspices to appropriate the properties for the state.
11. The fields retained by the United Church in China were the most unstable politically for in them were large pockets of anti-foreign sentiment.
12. Some Presbyterians felt the division was incomplete and were demanding a field in South China.

The Advantages of the settlement were:

1. Grant and McGillivray assured the United Church that they

- considered the Foreign Mission property question settled.
2. The settlement promoted friendly relations between the two Churches.
 3. The Presbyterians received a share in the overseas work.
 4. The settlement proved that the United Church was willing to divide the Foreign Mission work with the Presbyterians even though most missionaries were unionists.
 5. The Presbyterians now had a chance to show that they could support the overseas work properly. It had suffered greatly prior to Union.
 6. The transfer released funds and personnel for other needy fields in the United Church.
 7. The Presbyterians had agreed to treat all Unionist Missionaries who stayed on their fields without prejudice.
 8. The fields handed to the Presbyterians were the most trouble-free.
 9. There was less property involved than if the transfer of any other areas had been made.
 10. The Presbyterians would have greater security of title than if fields in China had been transferred.
 11. Political questions caused no anxiety in the fields that the Presbyterians received "and therefore the non-concurring Presbyterians should consider this if the point is raised that the United Church retains too large a share of the work."
 12. In Formosa there was a vigorous Chinese Church which would make work there easier for the Presbyterians.⁵⁶

After the settlement the Presbyterian Church opened up two mission fields. The decisions to start work in Japan and Manchuria were based on the need for ex-patriate personnel in these areas and on the availability of missionaries who had been dis-located by the Church Union settlement. However, in the case of Japan the local people had a large part in the decision to invite the Presbyterians in to carry on work. The Rev. H.T. Yamamoto, the Rev. Mr. Takakura and the Rev. Mr. Texaka of the Japanese Christian Church were consulted and welcomed the possibility of the connection with the Presbyterian Church. But because the Presbyterians were considering sending the Rev. Luther Young, formerly of Korea, to work among the Koreans in Japan it was decided to seek the advice of the committee in Korea under whose charge and by whose support the Korean work in Japan had been carried on. The work was languishing for lack of funds and staff so the committee - six Koreans and four missionaries - rejoiced that the Presbyterians were prepared to send in Young, a veteran missionary who had founded over 70 fields in the Hamheung area of Korea between 1904 and 1926.⁵⁷ The Church was called the Korean Christian Church in Japan and Young was made superintendent of the field. The Presbyterians budgetted \$7,000 for the first year of work in 1928. Young was in his late fifties when he started work in Japan.⁵⁸

The Presbyterians felt that they had the money and manpower necessary to open even more work for they accepted the invitation of the Irish and Scots Presbyterians laboring

in Manchuria to open work there. Dr. Goforth, in Honan China since 1888, and the Rev. Allan Reoch, a recent graduate of Knox College, and two lady missionaries opened up work in North Manchuria. Szepigkai, a city of 50,000 on the Manchuria railway, was chosen to be the headquarters for outreach into an area where missionaries had never been before.⁵⁹

Goforth was an old man going blind but he felt he had to serve overseas. His support came largely from Park Street church in Boston and from St. John's Church [Toronto?]⁶⁰ Evidently Goforth had been at one time a Unionist but came to oppose Church union in Canada on theological grounds and because he did not trust the Methodists.⁶¹ Both he and Young, like the leaders in the other Presbyterian foreign fields, were conservative in their theology and life-style. It was under such leadership that the Presbyterian foreign mission fields entered the long years of depression in the thirties.

The United Church, on the other hand, was gripped by the optimism of their new experiment and encouraged by their new strength. In 1927 the United Church of Canada published a pamphlet entitled With Christ in the Fellowship of Service which epitomized the spirit of the new church. The section of the Foreign Missions Report was entitled, "The Sun Never Sets on the Work of the United Church." The Congregationalists had brought the Angola field into Union while the Methodists had contributed great fields in China and Japan. These, combined with the former Presbyterian work in Trinidad, China, India and Korea, employed 614 missionaries and more than 2,000

"native" Christian helpers in evangelistic outreach, in thousands of schools, in hundreds of outstations, and in scores of hospitals, colleges and seminaries. The attitude of the "native" Christians in the foreign fields was summed up by Dr. J. Endicott, "In India they listen eagerly to the Gospel but they say continually, 'If only we could banish the barriers, if only we could take away denominationalism.' That is what they are saying too in China."⁶² And yet, as this paper has sought to show, the "native" Christians had no role in determining what would happen to their churches in the Canadian Church Union Controversy of 1925.

One anti-Unionist, a Mr. T.H. Litster, in a letter to The Globe and Mail, argued that the "native" churches should have been allowed to express themselves on the issue and he was sure that if they had voted they would have chosen to remain with "the Auld Kirk" along with the majority of the missionaries.⁶³ Armstrong replied first, that the majority of the missionaries overseas were Unionists and second, that the "native" Christians had no say in what was to be done with Canadian properties and interests. He wrote:

Of course you know that Formosan pastors and Church members could not possibly be given a vote in a Union that does not concern their Church. A Church on the Field is not a part of the Church in Canada.... Had they, however, been entitled to a vote on the question of the union in this country, there is no doubt whatever of the way in which they would have voted. It is universally true in all our Mission Fields that the people deplore the divisions of western lands which we have imported into their countries....⁶⁴

Armstrong was right - the "native" Christians would have voted for union, perhaps for the reasons he gave but probably because they would have followed the lead of their white missionary mentors. In British Guiana, when the Unionist missionaries decided to offer the field to the Presbyterians there is no evidence that any "native" Christians questioned the decision, let alone rebelled against it. The protest from the "native" Christians in India came because many of the white missionaries were unhappy that the Bhil field was given to the Presbyterians without their approval. In Gwalior and Formosa the "native" Christians did not protest remaining with the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

In another letter to Litster, Armstrong made it very clear that what happened to the overseas fields was a Canadian matter which did not involve "native" Christians in those fields at all. In speaking of Honan he said:

There are two Chinese Presbyteries in Honan, one in the North and the other in the South end of the Field. These have no connection whatever with the Church in Canada but are part of the Church in China. These two Presbyteries form a Synod of the Church in China. My statement, therefore, is absolutely correct that the Christians and the Churches in our Asiatic and African fields could not possibly have been entitled to a vote in the matter of Church Union in Canada. What the churches in Canada do in the matter of uniting with one another is of no concern whatever to the Oriental churches (except as a matter of interest, and I believe they are intensely interested in our Union). It is, therefore, only the Canadian missionaries who form the Honan Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Canada who are now constituted as a court of the United Church of Canada....⁶⁵

Yes, the "Great Divorce" was settled by the Canadian

"parents" with no reference to the "children" abroad. But at least it was done with concern by both sides that the best thing possible be done for the "children" in light of the conflicting claims. And it is heartening to read that in this part of the "DisUnion" settlement a spirit of co-operative good-will prevailed in spite of the unChristian hassle that went on over issues at home.

FOOTNOTES to "The Great Divorce and What Happened to the Children"

1. In this paper the one-third of the Presbyterians who remained outside the union will be referred to as the non-concurring Presbyterians or the anti-Unionists and the two-thirds of the Presbyterians who entered the union will be referred to as the United Church or the Unionists. For years after 1925 both the continuing Presbyterians and the Unionists considered themselves to be "The Presbyterian Church in Canada". The strong feelings about which church should use the name "The Presbyterian Church in Canada" came out in a report of the United Church of Canada Executive Committee:
 - (c) That in all further negotiations with the non-unionists they should be asked, in describing the institution which they represent, to conform themselves to the phraseology of the United Church of Canada Act, "The Church of the non-concurring Churches."

The United Church of Canada Year Book and Record of Proceedings (1926), p. 170.
2. The United Church Archives, Victoria College. A paper entitled, "From Dr. Scott's Record of May-June" stamped July 6, 1926.
3. J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada 1875-1925 (Toronto: The General Board, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1925), pp. 116-136.
4. For example, one of the most advanced churches abroad, the church in Trinidad, had a Presbytery, with native representation, but it was dominated numerically and psychologically by the missionaries.
5. A.E. Armstrong, letter to all overseas missionaries, undated, quoted in the British Guiana Mission Council Minutes July 2, 1926. The other two principles were 1) that any division would involve no injury to the work on the fields; 2) that any division would not violate the rights of the missionaries to determine their church allegiance and sphere of service.
6. R.P. MacKay, "The Foreign Mission Fund", The Presbyterian Witness (January 17, 1920).
7. R.P. MacKay, letter to J. Scrimgeour, April 20, 1922.
8. The Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (1926) Appendices p. 13.

9. Ibid.
10. A.E. Armstrong, letter to J.B. Cropper, July 25, 1923.
11. R.P. MacKay, letter to N. Rattee, April 7, 1924.
12. C.A. Dunn, "The Canadian Mission in British Guiana: The Pioneer Years 1885-1927" unpublished M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, 1971. p. 174.
13. The United Church Archives, "Statement re Foreign Missionaries of the United Church of Canada." Undated.
14. A.E. Armstrong, letter to J.W.H. Milne, January 22, 1926.
15. A.E. Armstrong, letter to J.H. Lemon, January 22, 1926. This is a quotation from the August editorial of "The Central India Torch" published by the Mission Council.
16. Quoted by R.P. MacKay, A.E. Armstrong and A. Gandier, letter to all missionaries, November 3, 1925.
17. A.A. Scott, letter to A.S. Grant, September 10, 1925.
18. A.E. Armstrong, letter to the Central India Mission Council, undated, quoted by J. Buchanan in a letter to The Montreal Witness, written July 8, 1925 and published by The Montreal Witness August 12, 1925.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. The Acts and Proceedings (1926) Appendices p. 12.
22. J.T. Taylor, letter to A. Grant and N.H. McGillivray, September 3, 1925.
23. A.E. Armstrong, letter to A.S. Grant, August 5, 1926.
24. R.P. MacKay, letter to all missionaries, May 27, 1926.
25. The Acts and Proceedings (1926) pp. 12-13.
26. A.E. Armstrong, letter to J.W.H. Milne, January 22, 1926.
27. The Acts and Proceedings (1926) pp. 12-13
28. Ibid.

29. The Presbyterian Witness (February 4, 1911).
30. A.E. Armstrong, letter to A.S. Grant, July 16, 1926.
31. The Acts and Proceedings (1926) p. 12.
32. The Minutes of the British Guiana Mission Council, July 2, 1926.
33. Ibid.
34. A.E. Armstrong, letter to A.S. Grant, April 6, 1926.
35. R.P. MacKay, letter to the Missionaries of our Foreign Fields, May 27, 1926.
36. Ibid.
37. J.R. Harcourt, letter to Armstrong, January 1, 1926.
38. J.S. MacKay, letter to A.E. Armstrong, December 16, 1925.
39. Quoted from the Minutes (undated) of the Formosa Mission Council by A.E. Armstrong, letter to A.S. Grant, August 5, 1926.
40. A.E. Armstrong, letter to A.S. Grant, September 20, 1926.
41. A.E. Armstrong, letter to J.M. Kinney, September 25, 1926.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. A.S. Grant, letter to A.E. Armstrong, September 20, 1926.
45. J. Scrimgeour, letter to A.E. Armstrong, July 1, 1925.
46. A.E. Armstrong, letter to A.S. Grant, March 3, 1927.
47. J. McNab, They Went Forth (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1933) p. 97.
48. A.E. Armstrong, letter to G.W. Mason, November 10, 1926.
49. A. Gandier, Speech to the Foreign Mission Board, October 4, 1927.
50. The United Church Archives, a mimeographed paper entitled, "Missionaries in Fields Transferred September 20, 1926".

51. Dunn, p. 203. Interview with Margaret Scrimgeour, November 7, 1970.
52. The Acts and Proceedings (1927) pp. 39, 77.
53. "Missionaries in Fields Transferred September 20, 1926".
54. A.E. Armstrong, letter to J.M. Kinney, September 25, 1926.
55. A. Gandier, Speech to the Foreign Mission Board, October 4, 1927.
56. The United Church Archives, "Memorandum re Advantages and Dis-advantages of assigning certain Areas Abroad to the Non-concurring Presbyterian Board of Missions". November 9, 1926.
57. The Acts and Proceedings (1928) Appendices p. 40.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid. p. 44
60. M.H. Brown, The History of the Honan Mission 1887-1951 Vol. III, Chapter LXX p.2.
61. Ibid.
62. United Church Archives, The United Church of Canada, With Christ in the Fellowship of Service, 1927.
63. T.H. Litster, letter to The Globe and Mail, undated, printed June 28, 1926.
64. A.E. Armstrong, letter to T.H. Litster, June 29, 1926.
65. A.E. Armstrong, letter to T.H. Litster, July 7, 1926.