

The Principle of the Congregational Churches

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The Principle of the Congregational Churches

BY
A. D. MARTIN

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To my Daughter

KATHLEEN

*representative to me of many Young People in
our Churches, at once Puritan and Catholic.*

FIRST PUBLISHED 1927

FOREWORD

I HAVE very great pleasure in writing a foreword to my friend Mr. Martin's book on "The Principle of the Congregational Churches." I have read the MS. with great pleasure and profit to myself. I do not remember any little book on Congregationalism which has so "warmed my heart." While the book was written primarily for the Young People's Examination I confidently predict for it a wider circle of readers and a larger usefulness. It would do a great service to the denomination if every member of our Churches could read Mr. Martin's book, and I hope it will have a very large circulation.

S. M. BERRY.

We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.—
S. PAUL'S *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 13:8.

*There will come a time when three words uttered with charity
and meekness shall receive a far more blessed reward than three
thousand volumes written with disdainful sharpness of wit.—*
HOOKER'S *Ecclesiastical Polity, Preface.*

*'Tis Liberty alone that gives the flower
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume,
And we are weeds without it.*

—COWPER'S *The Winter Morning Walk.*

PREFACE

THE subject of this little book, is indicated in its title. It is not a history of Congregationalism, but an exposition of the principle upon which Congregational Churches have been founded, and by which they live to-day. History is introduced only for the unfolding of an idea, merely a small selection of the rich material available being utilised. The writer's authorities are mainly indicated in their proper places. Here he desires to acknowledge special indebtedness to the various works of the Rev. F. J. Powicke, M.A., PH. D. Should any young reader be stirred to inquire further in these matters, he could not do better than turn to Silvester Horne's *A Popular History of the Free Churches*, and to Dr. John Brown's fascinating work, *The Pilgrim Fathers of New England*, the latter of which covers a good deal more than its title indicates. Of special value for the background of the early beginnings of our Churches is *The Seconde Parte of a Register. Being a Calendar of MSS. under that title intended for publication by the Puritans about 1593, and now in Dr. Williams's Library, London*, edited by the Rev. Albert Peel, M.A., LITT.D. *The Work and Administration of a Congregational Church*, by the Rev. T. T. James, M.A., is a handbook for the guidance of those who hold positions of trust in Congregational Churches, whilst also being a work of general interest for our subject. Dr. Selbie's newly published *Congregationalism* in the Series known as *The Faiths* (edited by Dr. Jacks) provides a fairly complete survey of our system of Church life, and is specially useful for its theological references. Of larger works, Dr. Henry W. Clark's *History of English Nonconformity* gives reasonable space to our history and unfolds a great spiritual truth.

I have to thank Dr. Berry for his Foreword, and also Dr. Peel who has read my MS. and made some suggestions of which I have been glad to avail myself.

All Scripture quotations are from the Revised Version.

I have modernised the spelling of quotations from original sources.

A. D. M.

Danbury, Essex.

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PROLOGUE

ONE of Robert Browning's poems, his *Christmas-Eve and Easter Day*, has a special significance for the members and adherents of Congregational Churches. The poet himself was baptised in York Street Congregational Church, Walworth, now converted into the Browning Hall Settlement, and there as a boy he was accustomed to worship with his parents. Later in life he sometimes joined in the worship of other Congregational Churches. His gifted wife came also of a Congregational family. Through this contact with our Churches Browning received impressions which he subsequently wove into the texture of his poetry. Thus the emphasis which he repeatedly places upon the prerogatives and responsibilities of the individual is in close agreement with our whole system of thought and life. *Christmas-Eve and Easter Day* illustrates this, and the former part of the work especially contains a warning against dangers to Christian individuality which, felt in his time, have steadily increased in our own. The poem describes three Christian assemblies, meeting simultaneously on the stormy Christmas-Eve of 1849. In the first, gathered within a typical dissenting chapel of the countryside, the poet himself, driven by bad weather for refuge, endeavours to take part. Displeased, however, with its crudeness, and overcome by sleep, he dreams that he has left the chapel and is surprised by a vision of Christ on the common outside. His Lord rebukes him, not by word but by manner, for the contempt he has felt towards the simple worship of the chapel people. Then He conveys him to the Cathedral of St. Peter at Rome, where he witnesses a gorgeous celebration of the Mass. There, too, it seems is something Christ approves and would have His disciple welcome. From St. Peter's

he passes to a German college to listen to a rationalistic explanation of Christ, and, though at first repelled, he discovers that even here Christ has His friends. Musing on these experiences and resolving to welcome the best in all forms of Christian life, he sits outside the college hall, still retaining in his hand the hem of Christ's garment, by which he has been miraculously transported from place to place.

'This tolerance is a genial mood!
(Said I, and a little pause ensued).
'One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
A value for religion's self,
A carelessness about the sects of it.'

And he recalls the sentiment of Pope's *Universal Prayer* which merged the several worships of saints and savages and sages in one common recognition of a Father of all. Then suddenly comes disaster.

'Twas the horrible storm began afresh!
The black night caught me in his mesh,
Whirled me up, and flung me prone.
I was left on the college-step alone.
I looked, and far there, ever fleeting
Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening vesture!—
Swept forward from my stupid hand,
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
O'er the various modes of man's belief.
I sprang up with fear's vehemence.
Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship: let me strive

To find it, and when found, contrive,
My fellows also take their share!
This constitutes my earthly care:
God's is above it and distinct.

There is much else in the poem beside the conclusion here reached, but there is nothing more true to the needs of our own Church-life to-day. Since 1849 we have grown yet more tolerant. God forbid that we should ever return to the old, straight-backed thought-pews, wherein our fathers worshipped, isolated from their fellow Christians. But there is 'a danger of our losing the sense of Christ's Presence in an undiscerning sympathy with all who profess religion of any sort. For that passionate individualism which runs throughout Browning's poems, and which is one of the best fruits of historic Congregationalism, is truly of Christ, from Whom first of all we have learnt both the value and the responsibility of the individual soul. And I ought not to enter with sympathy into the beliefs and practices of other communions than my own, unless I do so with eyes that can see differences and discriminate spiritual values, for the building up. of my own personality and the enrichment of my own Church. The very nature of Congregationalism, its freedom from obligatory forms and from articles of theology drawn up in the transitory fashion of some particular age, exposes it in unusual measure to the. perils of that "mild indifferentism," in which the Vision of Christ fades away. To guard against those perils we must endeavour to perceive and to obey the formative principle by which our Churches exist.

CHAPTER I

The Hole of the Pit

Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged.—ISAIAH 51:1.

Is there anything which can either be thoroughly understood or soundly judged of, till the very first causes and principles from which originally it springeth be made manifest?—HOOKER'S Ecclesiastical Polity, I., 16.

Neo religionis est coqere religionem (It. is contrary to religion to compel religion).—TERTULLIAN, Ad. Scap. 2.

ALTHOUGH there are some traces of the existence of independent Churches in England before the reign of Queen Elizabeth, it is to her time we must look for the real beginning of historic Congregationalism. With the accession of Elizabeth the Church of England, definitely, and, we may hope, finally, broke away from all subordination to the Church of Rome, and underwent such changes as virtually refashioned it into a semi-Protestant Church. All Papal authority was renounced; the Church of Rome was declared to have “erred not only in living and manner of Ceremonies but also in matters of Faith (Article xix.)” In particular the doctrine of the Mass, the central act of worship in the Roman Church, was denounced as “a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit (Art. xxxi.)” Such positions as these were fully in accord with the beliefs of those earnest-minded men whom the Roman persecution under Queen Mary had driven abroad, and who now returned to England to stimulate with their spirit; quickened as they had been

by contact with Continental Protestants, the small body of truly religious people who were longing for a purer Church. Beyond these comparatively few zealous souls were multitudes of English people who, while recoiling from the blood-stained tyranny of Rome, were but imperfectly informed as to Reformation-teaching, and to whom the New Testament was only just becoming an accessible book.

As far as the nation generally was concerned the morality of the time was not of a very high order. Holinshed's *Chronicle* for 1577 has a chapter, "Of sundry kinds of punishment appointed for offenders," which portrays a considerable amount of crime. The writer speaks of Henry VIII as having been very severe in repression of thieves and rogues. "He did hang up threescore and twelve thousand of them in his time. He seemed for a while greatly to have terrified the rest; but since his death the number of them is so increased, yea, although we have had no wars, which are a great occasion of their breed (for it is the custom of the more idle sort, having once served, or but seen the other side of the sea under colour of service, to shake hand with labour for ever, thinking it a disgrace for himself to return unto his former trade), that, except some better order be taken, or the laws already made be better executed, such as dwell in uplandish towns and little villages shall live but in small safety and rest." A treatise by John Penry, to which we must return presently, discloses a yet more serious condition in Wales. "What a hand we have had in adultery and fornication, the great number of illegitimate and base born among us do testify. . . . It is irksome to think how hardly a poor man can. keep anything from thieves of great countenance. Though he seeth his own sheep or other cattle feed within two miles of him in some men's pastures, he dareth not ask them. Quaffing and

surfeiting is too common. All are become Ishmaels . . . Churchmen and all will have their right by the sword, for by the word they never seek it.”*

If the age was not as depraved and ignoble as some other periods of our history have been, disorder, ignorance and superstition abounded. The condition of the common people called for a clear presentation of those saving truths which in the history of Christianity have often proved their power to regenerate the life of mankind. But the response of the Church to this call was fatuous to the point of absurdity. It committed the fundamental error—if error it may be called and not sheer apostasy—of announcing that the nation with all its “rogues” and the Church were already one. Here we touch the bottom fact in that controversy of Puritanism out of which our Congregational Churches arose. Addressing the Puritan leaders, Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, declared: “I perceive no such distinction of the Commonwealth and the Church that they should be counted, as it were, two several bodies, governed with divers laws and divers magistrates except the Church be linked with an heathenish and idolatrous Commonwealth. . . . Your distinction betwixt the Church and the Commonwealth, if it were in Nero’s or Diocletian’s time, might be admitted without exception; but in my opinion it is not so fit in this time, and especially in this kingdom. . . . It cannot yet sink into my head that he should be a member of a Christian Commonwealth that is not also a member of the Church of Christ, concerning the outward Society.”† A far greater man than Whitgift, Richard Hooker, in his *Ecclesiastical Polity* (VIII., 1–7) expressed the same view. “There is not any man,” he said, “of the Church

* *The Equity of an Humble Supplication.*

† *Whitgift’s Works. (Parker Society Edition.) Vol. I, pp. 21–2 and p. 388. See also pp. 183 and 261.*

of England but the same man is also a member of the Commonwealth; nor any man a member of the Commonwealth, which is not also of the Church of England.” For this doctrine Hooker Ignored the New Testament, basing his teaching upon the Old Testament conception of Israel as a People of God.

Such, then, was the position taken by the leaders of the English Church in Elizabeth’s day. It was in truth an inherited conception from Medievalism, and its roots went far back into ancient Paganisms with their rival deities operating in rival lands. So all Holinshed’s rogues, murderers and drunkards were members of Christ’s Church! It is no wonder that in view of this teaching the desire of godly men to see a holy Church was regarded with contempt or pity. The Holinshed chronicler remarks, “Neither is it possible . . . to stir up such an exquisite face of the Church as we imagine or desire; since our corruption is such that it will never yield to so great perfection.” In this the chronicler was but echoing what we can only call the doctrine of Impuritanism, a doctrine which meets us often in the history of Episcopal Christianity. It goes back at least to S. Augustine who distinguished “between the ideal and the visible Church, because the latter is as a herd in which there are both sheep and goats, and a net in which there are both good and bad fish.”* It was probably S. Augustine’s strong influence down the Christian centuries, which led Hooker to unfold this same doctrine of Impuritanism, based on the same misunderstanding of our Lord’s use of parable. To Hooker the visible Church must be permitted to include those who “to the eyes of the sounder parts of the Church” are “most execrable.”†

* Farrar’s *Lives of the Fathers*, II., 534.

† *Ecclesiastical Polity*, III. 1 §8.

Now to a sixteenth century reader of the New Testament, innocent of ecclesiastical traditions, this identification of the Church with the Nation and the consequent acceptance of Impuritanism must have been strange doctrine. But the astonishing thing is that the same position should have been maintained in succeeding times even down to our own. In 1919, Mr. St. Loe Strachey, editor of *The Spectator*, published in that journal a series of articles on the English Church based upon Whitgift and Hooker. "The Church," he said, "is the Nation on its spiritual side"—this despite the fact that now immense multitudes of the nation make no attempt to live according to the Church's teaching. So also echoes of the doctrine of Impuritanism may still be heard. In an authoritative work of Anglican Church History—*A History of the English Church*, edited by the late Dean Stephens and Dr. William Hunt—the writer of Volume V., Bishop Frere, observes of the Puritans: "Their soul longed for that ideal Christian Society which *in spite of our Lord's discouragement of any such hope*;* many men of very various mould have from time to time hoped to find or found here on earth" (p. 168)—a vain hope, indeed, if the Church and the People of England are to be regarded as already one. But we who are outside the English Church have a more ethical conception of the initial requirements of Church membership, and therefore do not regard as impossible the New Testament declaration that Christ so loved the Church and gave Himself for it *that he might present the Church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27)*; nor do we conceive that S. Paul intended by these words merely a forecast of a Church in Heaven, and not also a

* Italics mine.

visible society which, like the Puritans, we should “hope to find or found here on earth.” However imperfect our endeavours, we esteem as the first of all heresies any doctrine of acquiesced-in Impuritanism, such as that of Augustine and Hooker.

Let us now see, however, how in Elizabeth’s reign the Anglicans worked out their position. In the first place, the population of England in the sixteenth century was small enough to enable the State to find a place in the parish churches for everyone, and everyone was required by law, under penalty of a heavy fine, to occupy that place at least once a week. The duty of presenting infants for baptism was clearly set before parents, and in baptism the child was “regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ.” So the natural man became the spiritual. So a child was “Christened”—unhappily the expression still survives—that is, made a Christian. Here was no “strait gate,” no agonising to enter in, but a short and easy way of making Church and Nation one. Thereafter, at the appropriate age, would come participation in the Lord’s Supper, whereby the soul was fed and nourished unto eternal life. The whole adult population of a parish was expected to be communicant and sometimes was.★

The strength of this position lay in the fact that it suited well those large masses of the people who were *not righteous overmuch*, nor religious overmuch, while yet vaguely conscious that absolute irreligion and atheism were too daring to be comfortable. A Church, therefore, that was not very mindful of spiritual reality was their proper home, wherein by punctual attendance they acquired the values of a life-insurance policy in the Kingdom of Heaven. “The Tudor English,” says Mr. Trevelyan in his recent *History of England* (p. 330), “were interested in

★ *A History of the English Church, Vol. V, p. 104.*

many other things beside religion”—a remark which opens to us the whole controversy as between Congregationalists and the world at large, seeing that we have no uses for a religion which does not impregnate all the interests of life.

Here, then, the Elizabethan Church met the infirmities of human nature with a dictated worship. Its policy is frankly stated in a document entitled, *A Declaration of the Queen's Proceedings since her Reign*. This affirmed that the duty of the Crown was to see that all subjects conformed to the Church: “No further inquisition is made as regards faith, so long as people profess the Christian faith defined by Holy Scripture and the Creeds, nor as regards ceremonies and externals, so long as people are outwardly conformable.”* Men might think what they liked, feel, intend what they liked, but by so many bodily acts they were required to do homage to the religion chosen for them by their rulers. The gravest sin of Elizabethan Anglicanism was the premium it thus placed upon hypocrisy. Indeed, the moral recklessness of the Church authorities actually contemplated the hypocrisy of conformity with cynical indifference. A Separatist minister on trial before the Court of High Commission declared that if he went to the parish Church and conformed to its worship, “he should dissemble and play the hypocrite, for he thought it utterly unlawful”; to which one of the commissioners answered, “Come to church and obey the Queen's laws, and be a dissembler, be a hypocrite, or a devil if thou wilt.”† There must have

* Bishop Frere's *The English Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I.*, pp. 146-7. The declaration though drawn up was not published. So real is the persistence of Elizabethanism in the Church of England that we find Bishop Frere remarking: “It is a pity that so fine (*sic*) an exposition was not made to the generation for which it was devised.”

† See Peel's *Seconde Parte of a Register* and Neal's *A History of the Puritans*, I., pp. 470-1.

been many thousands of Englishmen whom the laws of the Church thus exercised in the practices of dissimulation. The fact is the rulers of the Church had only very low ideas of what religion is. Archbishop Whitgift, addressing the Queen on one occasion, described it as “the foundation and cement of human societies.”* That was his governing idea: religion had what we should call a certain “police value”: it helped to drill the people into obedience to the State. The same conception came out in his attitude to reform. On more than one occasion he protested against any alteration in the liturgy “for this general reason, *Lest the Church should be thought to have maintained an error.*”† The same attitude is expressed by Hooker: “But true withal it is, that alteration though it be from worse to better hath in it inconveniences, land those weighty. . . . When we abrogate a law as being ill made, the whole cause for which it was made still remaining, do we not herein revoke our very own deed, and upbraid ourselves with folly, yea, all that were makers of it with oversight and with error? Further, if it be a law which the custom and continual practice of many ages or years hath confirmed in the minds of men, to alter it must needs be troublesome and scandalous. . . . So that to change any such law must needs with the common sort impair and weaken the force of those grounds, whereby all laws are made effectual.”‡ Hooker, indeed, admitted grudgingly enough, that sometimes reforms were inevitable; his frame of mind, however, and that of the great archbishop he so much revered, is plainly revealed in the sentence just quoted. Religion was conceived by both men as, before all else, a matter of legal obligation, apolitical force to be directed by the Crown for the safety

* Walton's *Life of Mr. Richard Hooker*.

† Neal's *Puritans*, I., 353 and 398. Italics the author's.

‡ Hooker: *ibid.*, IV., 14.

of Society, not primarily as a spiritual concern lying in the relation of the individual soul to its Maker. Hence all questions of reform were not questions of truth, or of right, but of expediency.

What, then, was it expedient for England to do in regard to religion in Queen Elizabeth's reign? No State-policy is without its reasons, and there was a motive for the Elizabethan "settlement of religion," as it is generally called. The Queen herself was a prime agent in that policy. She was a true daughter of Henry VIII, a woman of great firmness of will, but of a secular mind, with no particular love of Truth, nor much care to practise Truth when dissimulation shewed a more convenient way. No varying of the forms of religious life was even interesting to one of her temperament, and, as with Whitgift, all such forms were valued by her more as instruments of State policy than as modes of access to God. She truly sought the welfare of her people, but it had to be won along the lines of her own choosing. She insisted upon being the captain of the ship of State, and she was. Archbishops, bishops and civil servants all had to bow to her will. The Act of Supremacy (1559) by which her first Parliament deposed the Papal authority and created the English sovereign the "Supreme Governor" of the Church—not Head, a title which to her credit Elizabeth refused—claimed for the "Prince" (*i.e.*, Sovereign) the right and duty of an ecclesiastical rulership. And Elizabeth held to that office firmly, understanding thereby, not that she had any determining voice in Church doctrine, but that whatever was Church doctrine she was to enforce, and that to whatever was the appointed way of worship she should compel her subjects to conform. Once made Governor of the Church, she consistently refused to Parliament all power of further intervention in purely Church affairs, and though, under the increasing

Puritanism of the latter part of her reign, the House of Commons often attempted to deal with Church matters, the Queen always peremptorily bade them to mind their own business: ecclesiastical concerns were in the hands of the Bishops and Convocation under herself. Moreover, in this distinctly ecclesiastical sphere, while willing enough to listen to the advice of her bishops, Elizabeth made her governorship a very real thing. There were moments when, through Puritan pressure, reform of some of the many abuses which existed, seemed feasible, but the hand of the Queen was always a check upon the process.*

What, it must now be asked, was the key to the policy of this remarkable woman? It may be stated in two words—foreign affairs. And here we cannot withhold our admiration for the penetration and width of her outlook. A large induction of facts, or some swift feminine intuition, shewed her where lay the danger not only to her throne, but also to her people's welfare. The shadow of the mightiest European Empire—the Empire of Spain—with its many ships and its veteran armies lay across the path of England's advance. Henry VIII had given England a navy, and her geographical position seemed to indicate the sea as her heritage. Daring mariners like leash hounds were ready to leap upon the ocean-ways to win a share of the wealth of that new world which the Pope had divided between his two best-loved sons, Spain and Portugal. And of these two powers Spain was fanatically loyal to the Papacy. If, therefore, the quarrel was to come with Spain, as every passing year seemed increasingly to suggest, it would be a quarrel with Rome also. That meant conflict at home as well as abroad, for, despite Tudor despotisms and abrupt Acts of Parliament, not all English Catholics could be trusted to

* Cf. *The Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II., p. 590.

perform an immediate *volte-face*. A Spanish descent upon England might enlist many adherents amongst those who regarded obedience to Rome as more incumbent upon their consciences than support of a princess whose birth, from the viewpoint of the Christian Religion, had been illegitimate.

So it was that throughout her management of the Church Elizabeth ever considered doctrines and ritual, not first of all as expressions of the truth of the Christian Religion, but as pieces in that mighty game of chess she was playing with King Philip II of Spain. Take the following fact in illustration of this. It was of national importance England should have a strong navy. To encourage seamanship, therefore, the fish-trade was stimulated by an ordinance which required all English people to eat fish, rather than meat, on Wednesdays, as well as on the Fridays and Saturdays previously so arranged for.* An act which was supposed to be an act of religious devotion was. required of all the nation under severe penalties for disobedience, not for the purposes of religion, but that through the fish-market and the fish-smack a larger class of men might learn to handle ships against the coming of the Spanish Armada.

Broadly speaking, political expediency kept back the cause of reform in several directions. Those large numbers of Englishmen who were of no particular religious conviction were to be safeguarded from any such recoiling attitude to reform as might drive them back into the arms of the Pope. The question of the truth and rightness of any proposed alteration in worship was not primary. The Queen and her Bishops looked at all advocated changes from an opportunist point of view. They were not prepared to follow the splendid High-Churchism of

* Frere's *A History*, etc., V, p. 101.

Scotland, which, just because of its consciousness of the Divine Spirit at work in the Church, claimed a competence to effect a full reformation according to Truth and Justice. The way so to be followed in England was such a middle path as might conciliate the children of Rome, satisfy the average man to whom religion was only one of various interests, and then, if possible, minister to a section of those devout people to whom Rome was not quite all it ought to be. Such, judged by their own statements, and yet more by their actions, was the mind of the rulers of the Elizabethan Church.

We must now take a look at the men who in this Church were to be *good stewards of the manifold grace of God*. Out of 9,400 clergy when the Act of Uniformity was passed, by which the doctrine of the Church was revolutionised once more, only 243, at the utmost, quitted their livings. Neal* observes of the rest, they “kept their places, as they had done through all the changes of the three last reigns; and without all question, if the Queen had died, and the old religion had been restored, they would have turned again.” In short, the overwhelming majority of the men in charge of the parish churches were like the famous “Vicar of Bray” in the popular song.† They were quite willing to offer the Roman Sacrifice of the Mass and regard the consecrated wafer as the very body of our Lord, “the same that was born of the Virgin with the bones and sinews and all that appertaineth to the perfection of a man;”‡ or, if the Queen of England and her advisers so willed it, they were equally ready to regard the Mass as “a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit.”§

* History of the Puritans, Vol. I., p. 145.

† Archbishop Whit gift himself conformed both to Mary’s Church and to Elizabeth’s (Neal’s *Puritans*, II., p. 22).

‡ Catechism of the Council of Trent.

§ Article 31 of the Prayer Book.

In fact, they almost overdid compliancy. Now and again a bishop suspected all was not right. Early in Elizabeth's reign Bishop Best of Carlisle found almost all the clergy of his diocese ready enough to take the Oath of Supremacy, but he described them as "wicked imps of Anti-Christ, and for the most part very ignorant and stubborn, past measure false and soothly only fear maketh them obedient."* Nor was Archbishop Whitgift wholly blind to the real character of his clergy. Writing in defence of the existing system of patronage, he declared that the Church was "full of hypocrites" dissemblers, drunkards, whoremongers, etc.; so that, if any election (of ministers) were committed to them, they would be sure to take one like to themselves.†

Much of the trouble lay in this patronage, which Whitgift so curiously defended. It was largely in the hands of entirely worldly rich men. *Holinshed's Chronicle* complains that "some do bestow advowsons of benefices upon their bakers, butlers, cooks, good archers, falconers, and horsekeepers, instead of other recompense, for their long and faithful service, which they employ afterwards unto the most advantage." Other contemporary writers speak of the clergy as largely unlearned men drawn from "the basest sort of the people."

Criminal as the action of the patrons often was, the Bishops and the Queen were yet more to blame. The Church historian, Bishop Frere, already quoted, declares: "Legislation in 1559 had stopped the alienation of the property of the sees to any subject, but Elizabeth reserved to herself the power to receive such spoil. She had, moreover, grown increasingly content, so long as she had a few good and capable prelates to serve her, to give the rest of the ecclesiastical places to men of no worth except

* Frere, *ibid.*, p. 67.

† Whitgift's *Works*, Vol. I., p. 382.

as sponges, whom she could first squeeze herself and then leave to suck up what they could in the positions where she placed them.”* Archbishop Parker, though he was undoubtedly one of the best of the prelates, drew up a scale of charges for the livings which were in his gift, charging more to those who bought on behalf of their little boys than to a grown-up applicant.† This was bad enough, but it was hardly the worst.

Men who are appointed to livings in the Church of England must be in “holy orders.” Behind the question of patronage, therefore, was the question of ordination. How were “orders” conferred in Elizabeth’s time? At a conference between the Queen and her bishops at Somerset Place, it was reported that the Bishop of Lichfield had made “70 ministers in one day for money; some tailors” some shoe-makers and other craftsmen.”‡ Venality seemed to be the order of the day. Very many both of the bishops and the clergy were pluralists, *i.e.*, they held more offices than one, and as it is not possible to be in two places at the same time, it followed that many parishes were almost entirely neglected. Large numbers of Churches were without any incumbent at all. In more than one instance a living was kept vacant for seven or eight, or even twelve years. Out of 850 benefices subject to one bishop, nearly 100 were at one time vacant. Out of fourteen parish churches in Winchester eleven were vacant.§ The reason given for this deplorable state of things was the slenderness of the stipends, which was the excuse also for pluralism.

* *A History*, pp. 302–303.

† *The Story of the English Separatists*—Mackennal, p. 93. Boy parsons were continually in evidence and objected to by the Puritans. See Peel’s *Register*, I., 259, *et pass.*

‡ See Waddington’s *Congregational History*, pp. 36–38, and Peel’s *Register*, Vol. II., pp. 16–17.

§ *A History*, etc. (Frere), V, p. 105.

But when there were clergy, and when they did officiate, few made any attempt to preach. "The Archdeacon of Leicester had only fifteen preachers among his 129 clergy, and the Archdeacon of Coventry only three among sixty-seven."* In Cornwall, during Archbishop Parker's time, of 140 clergy not one could preach, and most were non-resident. John Penry declared that in Wales, after twenty-eight years of Elizabeth's rule, for one parish, which had a sermon once a quarter, there were twenty that had none.† In fact, "at this day we have not twelve in all our country that do discharge their duty in any good sort. . . . Non-residences have cut the throat of our Church."‡

The spiritual destitution of England and Wales was thus acute. Generally speaking, the public worship exercised neither the mysterious, if superstitious attractiveness and subduing charm of Rome, nor the morally-regenerating power which ever accompanies the sincere and earnest utterance of the New Testament Gospel.

One most notable exception to the general condition is furnished by the "prophesyings." *Holinshed's Chronicle* thus describes these: "In many of our archdeaconries, we have an exercise lately begun which for the most part is called a *prophecy* or *conference*, and erected only for the examination or trial of the diligence of the clergy in their study of holy Scriptures. Howbeit, such is the thirsty desire of the people in these days to hear the Word of God, that they also have as it were with zealous violence intruded themselves among them (but as hearers only) to come by more knowledge through their presence at the same. Herein also (for the most part) two of the younger sort of ministers do expound each after other some piece of

* Frere, *ibid.*, p. 107.

† *The Equity of an Humble Supplication*, p. 45.

‡ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

the Scriptures . . . and when they have spent an hour or little more between them, then cometh one of the better learned sort, who . . . supplieth the room of a moderator . . . adding what him thinketh good of his own knowledge, whereby two hours are thus commonly spent at this most profitable meeting. . . . As it is used in some places weekly, in others once in fourteen days, in divers monthly, and elsewhere twice in a year, so is it a notable spur unto all the ministers thereby to apply their books, which otherwise (as in times past) would give themselves to hawking, hunting, tables, cards, dice, tippling at the alehouse, shooting of matches, and other like vanities.”*

Unhappily for the common peace, the study of Scripture, especially of the New Testament, is apt to light up in strange and questionable relief the overloaded organisation of the visible Church, and these Elizabethan prophesyings inevitably worked for a fuller Reformation. This was distasteful to the Queen, and they were suppressed. It is to the great credit of Archbishop Grindal—who, however, does not seem a favourite with modern Anglican writers—that he stoutly protested against the Queen’s prohibition. For this he was suspended from office and confined to his palace. The Queen had her way, except in so far as these Bible conferences could be carried on in secret, and she shares with Herod Antipas† the reputation of one who adds yet this above all other misdeeds—the closing of the Divine Word and the shutting up of its defender in prison.

The suppression of the prophesyings was the crowning evidence of the degradation of the Church by its Governor. As the years went by those who were discontented with the lack of reform gradually divided into two parties. On the one hand we have the Puritans, men of exceptional

* 1585, Bk. II., ch. I

† *S. Luke* 3:20.

devotion, to whom Episcopacy itself had become a discredited system, and who coveted the simpler church-machinery of the reformed communions on the Continent and in Scotland. [The Scots Church, indeed, was able to claim, in the words of John Knox, that “no dregs of Papistry” remained in it.] The distinctiveness of this Puritan party was that it sought the complete reform of the Church of England, but most emphatically not at the cost of schism. They would mould the Church afresh from within. In this, however, they signally failed.

On the other hand, there gradually arose a party of Separatists, so-called because their watchword was the great exhortation of S. Paul, *Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.** To these men the first consideration was the need for reality in religion, the second the call for that holiness of life which would witness to the Presence of Christ as constituting the Church. They felt that in this transitory life no one could afford to neglect for a day the immortal interests of his own soul. They saw, too, that around them were the ignorant, the superstitious and the sinful, sheep that had no shepherd, or whose shepherds fed only their own carnal appetites, and that, if professed ministers of the Word thus neglected their work, it was incumbent upon those whose hearts God had changed to carry through the ministry of reconciliation in their stead. While men were dying in vice and unbelief, where, they may well have asked, was the use of looking, as some looked, for a reformation to come from within a Church, which was served by sensual and idle clergy, and which was governed largely by simoniacal bishops and a rapacious sovereign?

* II. Corinthians 6:17-18.

So at last these reform-seekers did not hesitate to separate and to found Churches, which might be fashioned after the primitive manner of the Churches of the New Testament—a model not difficult to perceive, though never easy to reproduce. Their best-loved phrase was “the gathered church,” a society of men drawn by the Spirit of God into fellowship one with another, under the immediate headship of Jesus Christ. It was not always clear to them what their teaching involved. They were pioneers hacking a path in a virgin forest. But the spring of the whole Separatist movement was a passion for Christ, that they might see Him in His holiness, their vision undimmed by worldly considerations, and the language of their worship in sincere accord with the teaching of His Word.

CHAPTER II

The Explorers

—*Till a voice, as bad as Conscience, rang interminable changes
On one everlasting Whisper day and night repeated—so:*

*“Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the
Ranges—*

*Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you.
Go!”*

RUDYARD KIPLING.

Alas for the pioneer whom his tailor applauds!

EDWARD THRING.

THE reproach of ignorance has often been laid upon Nonconformists. Congregationalists certainly have, not always been as careful as they are now to secure an adequately trained ministry. Nevertheless our church-system was not conceived in ignorance. The early Separatist leaders were all scholars and some of them men of high university attainment. To recall a few of the most illustrious: Henry Barrow, a distant relative of both Francis Bacon and Lord Burghley, was a graduate of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and for a time a law-student at Gray's Inn: John Greenwood, his friend and fellow-martyr, graduated at Corpus Christi, Cambridge: John Penry, also one of the martyrs, after qualifying at Peterhouse, Cambridge, proceeded to his M.A. at S. Alban's Hall, Oxford: Francis Johnson, another very prominent Separatist, was a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and a preacher before the University: John Robinson, the minister of the Church of the Pilgrim Fathers in Holland, also was a Fellow of Corpus Christi: Henry Ainsworth, another of the leaders, was a Hebrew scholar of European reputation, whose writings have been

repeatedly republished, and are said to have influenced somewhat our Revised Version. It is interesting to notice in this connection that in the later history of Separatism, when many had been driven abroad, there was great discussion amongst the exiles as to whether their ministers, in the public reading of Scripture, ought not to translate directly from the Hebrew and the Greek, instead of using one of the accepted versions. It is impossible to conceive of such a question being raised in a convocation of the Church of England in Queen Elizabeth's time.

Finally, we may notice that these ecclesiastical forefathers of ours were zealous for the spread of education. They even advocated free schools and a movement like our University-extension system. John Penry urged that there should be "in all shires a lecture of all sciences that such as could not put their sons to Cambridge or Oxford might have them in the Free Schools, and after by those lectures brought through all arts.".*

These men were thus among the most cultivated of their time. That, however, is not their chief distinction. Above all else they were seekers of New Testament truth and witnesses to the guiding hand of God.

The first Congregational minister of whom we have any authentic traces in Elizabeth's reign is Richard Fitz, about whom a little company of believers secretly gathered Fitz, together with Thomas Bowland (a deacon of his Church) and two others, was arrested and died in prison. A printed leaflet in the State Paper Office, entitled *The True Marks of Christ's Church*,. contains the following statement of the principles held by Fitz and his people. "The order of the Privy Church in London, which, by the malice of Satan is falsely slandered and evil spoken of. The minds of them, that by the strength and working of the Almighty, our Lord Jesus Christ, have set their

* See Mackennal's *The Story of the English Separatists*, p. 131.

hands and hearts to the pure, unmingled and sincere worshipping of God. . . . First and foremost, the glorious word and evangel preached, not in bondage and subjection, but freely and purely. Secondly, to have the Sacraments ministered purely only, and all together according to the institution and good word of the Lord Jesus, without any tradition or invention of man; and last of all to have not the filthy* canon law, but discipline only, and altogether agreeable to the same heavenly and Almighty Word of our good Lord Jesus Christ.—Richard Fytz, minister.”†

A more prominent and influential figure at this time was Robert Browne, a graduate of Corpus Christi, Cambridge, whose character exhibits somewhat perplexing features. By his earlier writings and by his preaching he did much to forward the cause of religious liberty. He assailed the Anglican principle of parish-Christianity. “The Kingdom of God,” he declared, “was not to be begun by whole parishes, but rather of the worthiest, were they never so few.” Such teaching naturally brought him into collision with the Established Church, and we find him wandering from place to place—in England and Scotland and Zeeland,—sometimes in dispute with his allies, and often in prison. He speaks, indeed, of having been imprisoned thirty-two times, often in places so dark that he could not see his hand before his face. Few of us would be able to support with consistency a life of so much suffering. Browne succumbed at last to the terrors of his position, was received back into the state-fold and given an obscure living in which he continued for forty years. His early teaching concerning the nature of the Church so truly influenced the course of Separatist history that the first members of our churches were often called

* *Filthy* is a frequently used adjective at this time, in the sense of *corrupt*.

† Waddington's *Congregational History*, I., 742-3.

“Brownists.” That name, however, was more fixed upon them by their enemies than adopted by themselves. The greatest of the early Independents, John Robinson, to whom we shall come in our next chapter, distinctly and rightly repudiated it. Gratefully do we recognise the services Browne rendered to our cause, but we cannot shut our eyes to his subsequent apostasy. Moreover our doctrine of the Church is too broad to be labelled by any man’s name save His Whose name is above every other.

Robert Browne’s experiences of suffering were shared by many others. Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Aylmer were chiefly responsible for the persecution of the Separatists. One would not willingly emphasise this fact, but that we shall not understand the position of the Separatist martyrs, unless we see clearly the character of the men who held chief offices in the Church the former repudiated. Whatever share the Crown had in the persecution, the Archbishop proved keener than some of the Queen’s civil advisers in carrying out her policy. Thus in a letter to Whitgift Lord Burghley declares: “Of late he had varied in his poor opinion from his Grace in that by his order” (*i.e.*, the Archbishop’s) “certain simple men had been rather sought by inquisition to be found offenders than upon their facts condemned.” To which Whitgift replies, “My good Lord, I am as yet fully persuaded that my manner of proceeding against these kind of men is both lawful, usual and charitable: neither can I devise how otherwise to deal to work any good effect; it is the only thing wherein your Lordship and I do differ; and I doubt not but that after conference we soon therein shall agree. Not severity but lenity, hath bred this schism in the Church.”* On another occasion we find Whitgift declaring “that it was a fault to suffer lewd

* Strype’s *Life and Acts of Archbishop Whitgift*, Vol. I., pp. 338–340.

ballads and book's touching manners (*i.e.*, morals); but that it was a greater fault to suffer books and libels, disturbing the peace of the Church and defacing true religion.* Whitgift here came very close to the attitude of the Roman Church, of which Prof. Gwatkin has said that it "has always valued unity and order more than truth."† Behind the Archbishop's words, however, one can see that horror of the dangers of Anabaptism which affected quite reasonable men in the sixteenth century. The preface to Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* contains a very powerful statement of this fear, and endeavours to shew how, step by step, Nonconformity led on to a shocking disavowal of moral ties. No doubt in this the case against the Anabaptists was overstated, the great majority of them being as severely moral as any of their critics. The tragic fact remains, however, that neither Hooker nor Whitgift hated lawlessness more than did the Separatists to whom both men were so strongly opposed.

And now what was this "lawful, usual and charitable manner" of which the Archbishop speaks in his letter to Burghley? There were at that time many secret gatherings of earnest and devout men and women to whom the barren services of the State Church were utterly unprofitable. They came together for no nefarious conspiracy—none of her subjects was more loyal to Elizabeth than these—but simply in order to read the Bible, to hear it explained and to pray. This was their crime, and, despite all precautions against surprisal, they were often betrayed and carried off to prison, where sometimes they were beaten with cudgels, and sometimes left month after month in conditions so foul that many died of I prison-fever. Neal, in his *History of the Puritans*, affirms that

* *Ibid.*, I., 82.

† *The Knowledge of God*, II., 188.

a whole congregation of fifty-six persons was seized at one time and that many "died in prison like rotten sheep."* Aylmer, Bishop of London, the man who said that for his part he would not deprive a clergyman of his living for adultery,† yet sent to Newgate three aged widows for the crime of Separatism, where two of them took the fever and died.‡

The crowning infamy in the persecution was the long-drawn-out procedure against Barrow and Greenwood, culminating in the year 1593 in their execution, followed shortly afterwards by the imprisonment and death of John Penry. It was while joining in a private meeting for the reading of Scripture at a friend's house near S. Paul's Cathedral that Greenwood was arrested, by order of Aylmer, and carried off to prison. There he lay for thirty weeks, and about the end of that time, Barrow, hearing of his friend's misfortune and greatly daring, went to visit him, and thereupon was arrested and committed to another gaol. Many were the fluctuations in the lot of these two ministers. They were examined by Whitgift several times. Anglican divines, visited them with a view to reducing them to submission. Both men were twice made ready for the scaffold and twice reprieved, only at last to be hanged at Tyburn, one early morning, with as few witnesses as possible. The death of John Penry a few weeks later removed one of the noblest spirits of the time—a man with an evangelic passion superadded to rich gifts of culture and breadth of outlook. Shortly before his end Penry wrote to Lord Burghley thus: "I am a poor young man, born and bred in the mountains of Wales. I am the first, since the last springing up of

* I., 469–471.

† Peel's Register, II., 31.

‡ *The Heroic Age of Independency*, by J. Guinness Rogers, pp. 41 and 60.

the Gospel in this latter age, that laboured to have the blessed seed thereof sown in these barren mountains. I have often rejoiced before God (He knoweth) that I had the favour to be born under her majesty for the promoting of this work. . . . And now being about to end my days, before I am come to one half of my years in the likely course of nature, I leave the success of my labours unto such of my countrymen as the Lord will raise up after me, for the accomplishing of that work which, in the calling of my countrymen unto the knowledge of Christ's blessed Gospel, I began. . . . Whatever I wrote in religion, the same I did simply for no other end than for the bringing of God's truth to life. I never did anything in this cause (Lord, Thou art witness!) for contention, vainglory, or to draw disciples after me."* Manifestly sincere as this is, other testimony of his bears more striking witness to the purity of his aim: "If my blood were an ocean sea, and every drop thereof were a life unto me, I would give them all, by the help of the Lord, for the maintenance of my confession. Yet if any error can be shewn therein, that will I not maintain."† So Penry and his brother-martyrs passed into "that life which despises and excludes all death whatever."‡

The various writings of these three men and the records of their successive trials are valuable to us, because they bring out very clearly the principles for which Separatism stood. These we must now endeavour to understand.

First of all, it should be clearly recognised that it was not from any speculative doctrine that they set out to establish separate churches. They were not arm-chair theorists interested in re-shaping the system of the Church

* Barclay's *Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*, p.42.

† *Lansdowne MSS.*, No. 109.

‡ Augustine's *City of God*, II., 206.

of England for the sake of innovation, or of getting to themselves ill name. It is in agreement with the usual character of the Divine leading that they did not see from the first the full implications of their action. For God guides us step by step, and, in the weakness of our nature, we often truly follow the light only for a time, and then falter, leaving it to those behind us to pursue more thoroughly the path we have begun to tread. We shall see certain inconsistencies in the early Separatists but yet more surely the reality of the Divine Spirit at work in them.

Perhaps the best illustration of these features of their career is John Penry's treatise, *The Equity of an Humble Supplication*, published in 1587. As a Welshman, Penry was deeply concerned with that condition of the principality, to which reference has already been made. He proposed no alteration in Church government. All he did was to lay bare the condition of his country, its immorality and sheer heathenism, the negligence of its clergy, and to plead that the souls of men were dying and passing into unending woe, because none preached to them the Gospel of Christ. "Our case," he says, "now is to be especially pitied in respect of the inner man. For how many souls do daily starve and perish among us for want of knowledge? And how many are like still to tread the same path? It grieveth me at the heart to consider how hell is enlarged to receive us" (p. 40). The redemptive passion of Christ shines clearly through all his pleading. "They that know," he says, "what it is to have their iniquities forgiven, and their sins covered by the sufferings and passions of Jesus Christ, will be wounded to see others under the curse" (p. 7). Such is ever the authentic note of Christian experience, the evidence that the Spirit of God is truly present. Yet for this *Humble Supplication*, almost abjectly respectful as it is

in its references to the Queen and her advisers, and temperate as is its language in speaking of the Bishops and clergy—except for the force of the facts recorded against them—Penry was imprisoned by order of Whitgift and the circulation of his book stopped.

The gist of the treatise was an appeal to Parliament to reform the existing Church and especially to furnish preachers for Wales. He frankly admitted the duty of the magistrate to extirpate heresy (pp. 19 and 22), though later he advanced to a more liberal position. So also Barrow and Greenwood “fully acknowledged the supremacy of the Crown in ecclesiastical matters.”* A little later Henry Ainsworth and Francis Johnson, joint-ministers of the exiled Separatist Church at Amsterdam, stated the same position. In their *Confession of Faith of certain English people living in the Low Countries, exiled*, they declared that it was the duty of princes and magistrates “to suppress and root out by their authority all false ministries, voluntary religions, and counterfeit worship of God . . . yea, to enforce all their subjects whether ecclesiastical or civil, to do their duties to God, and men.”† To us it seems strange that those who had suffered so much for their faith, and who refused to submit their religious life to the State’s direction, should yet assert the right of the State to enforce religion. The seeming inconsistency, however, is evidence for the strength of their conviction that their religion was not false, nor their worship counterfeit. Beyond that, the explanation of their failure to arrive at religious toleration lies in the character of the times. On the one hand, as has been already indicated, the Separatists did not ignore those fanatical excesses leading to actual immorality which

* Skeats and Miall’s *History of the Free Churches of England*, p. 19.

† Hanbury’s *Historical Memorials*, Art. 39.

had accompanied Continental Anabaptism. On the other hand, they could not forget the dangerous revival of Roman power then in progress through Europe. In 1572 occurred the massacre of S. Bartholomew, on hearing of which the Pope sang a *Te Deum* in S. Peter's, and the grim Philip II of Spain is said to have smiled his one historic smile. To plead for universal toleration at such a time was more than the faith of the Separatists could achieve. Hence they felt unable to break away, as far as the people generally were concerned, from the traditional principle of all Christendom—the unity of the civil and ecclesiastical power. Yet for themselves, perplexing as the situation was, and inconsistent as was their pleading, the beckoning Hand of God was most sure. When they found that all such appeals as Penry's *Humble Supplication* were met with the stern command to desist from criticism and, to be content with things as they were, what could they do, if they cared for Christ's Word at all, but withdraw from the parish church, and in the last resort from England too, in order to found a fellowship in which they might experience the quickening grace of Christ?

Here we reach the first cause of our historical Congregational Church System. We insist again, it was not the device of pedantic, fault-finding schismatics, dissenting for the sake of dissent. It was the house of refuge built by men who, amid the storms and desolation of an age of controversy, looked in vain to their Mother Church to fulfil her proper function of reclaiming and nourishing the perishing souls of men.

Unquestioningly as the controversy developed, the fear of Rome dominated the situation. When the Separatists began to shape their own fellowship, turning to the New Testament, they naturally felt very powerfully the contrast presented by the Roman Church to the Church of the

Apostles. They might almost have said with one of Browning's characters:*

I, a man
Able to mark where faith began
To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet,
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the founder's base——

They saw the overtopping, irregular temple of Ecclesiasticism, gold-glittering, many-coloured, world-applauded, but terribly out of line with the foundation which was Christ. And they sought to build anew in strict keeping with Apostolic and Christly simplicity. It necessarily followed that their controversies with the Bishops touched every detail of worship—the position of the Communion-table, kneeling at Communion, vestments of ministers, the sign of the Cross in Baptism, even the marriage-ring (since over that the Roman priest was wont to mutter unintelligible words that sounded like a charm†), and a score of other matters which we to-day should treat as questions of taste rather than of principle.

Often in their warfare they used scant respect for their opponents. Their language about Canterbury could be intemperate, and of Rome they spoke with sheer detestation. If they had only cultivated the tone of Hooker, who, while often lacking insight into his adversary's real position, yet wrote with courtesy and charity, they would have been worthier of praise, but our concern is to see beneath the foam of their words the tidal force of the Spirit flowing, through them, up into forsaken channels and ancient river-beds, where once the life of the Church had ministered to the spiritual commerce of mankind.

* In *Christmas Eve*.

† Hole's *A Manual of the Book of Common Prayer*, p. 37.

Gradually the Separatist doctrine of the Church became clearer and higher. Questioned during his trial concerning the composition of a true Church, Greenwood declared that a parish was not a church, but that only those who were believers in Christ and practisers of His teaching could be called a Church. The "Prince" (*i.e.*, Sovereign) was supreme in the State to punish evil and defend the good, but not in the Church. Of that Christ alone was head. Every congregation of believers, said Barrow, had the power of imposing discipline upon all its members. "The prince also, if he will be held a member of Christ or of the Church, must be subject to Christ's censure in the Church," even, if required, to the point of excommunication, while still retaining honour and authority in civil affairs as a Divinely appointed magistrate.* All the officers a church needed were a pastor, teacher and elder, and in the support of such a ministry voluntary gifts, not tithes, were the Christian method. In harmony with S. Paul's doctrine, they who preached the Gospel should live of the Gospel.

The Separatists were not always agreed concerning the Sacraments. In relation to Baptism some held the views which are now expressed by the Baptist denomination. Controversy, then, however, turned rather more than it does now upon the validity of the manner of Baptism. Though one might have anticipated the reverse, it was the Anglicans who were lax in regard to this, and the Separatists who were strict. One of the grievances against Anglicanism was the licence sometimes given to midwives to baptise infants who were not likely to live.† The Separatists claimed that the administration of Baptism

* Powicke's *Henry Barrow*, pp. 107-8.

† *Frere, op. cit.*, p. 192: also Neal, *op. cit.*, i., 376, who tells us that the Puritans alleged, as the reason for the Anglican haste to baptise, the belief that unbaptised infants were in danger of damnation, a position the Puritans did not share.

should be restricted to ministers, as the appointed representatives of the Church. One can see at once the two viewpoints. To the Anglican, as to the Romanist, the actual character of the Baptism was almost an indifferent matter; the great thing was to get the water used and the set words spoken, and, then, the spiritual consequences followed as a matter of course. This was really magic, not religion. The Separatist's interest was to secure religion, and to him, therefore, the validity of the Sacrament depended upon the piety of those who took part in, or administered it. Was there any guarantee of such faith and spiritual purpose in the employment of a chance midwife?

Barrow's teaching on the Communion of the Lord's Supper, again, savoured more of a High Church doctrine than of the opposite. Dr. Powicke in his *Life of Henry Barrow* thus sums it up: "It is far more than a commemorative act. It is a special means of grace. Christ can impart His life to a believing soul under any circumstances, but the ordinary channel of its communication is the bread and wine of the Supper. It is, therefore, a very grave thing to exclude a person from it. It is like destroying the seal by which the soul's deed of covenant with Christ is made sure (p. 109)." Barrow's own words bring out one feature of his doctrine which is important for any true conception of the Church. The bread and wine, he says, are a "lively and most comfortable symbol of our communion with Christ, *as also each with other in Christ** . . . public, free, open and alike common to all saints."† This note of Christian fellowship harmonises with the whole idea of the Separatist Church.‡

* Italics mine.

† *Ibid.*, p. 109.

‡ Cf. Powicke's *Henry Barrow*, p. 94.

Teaching, or preaching, was emphatically a motive power in the Separatist community. Here the Separatists and we, their spiritual descendants, have always struck an apostolic note. From some Anglican references to the sacraments and frequent disparagement of preaching one might imagine that the New Testament attributed a regenerative power to rites and ceremonies, however mechanically performed, rather than to that new-begetting incorruptible seed of the Word of God—that is, the spoken mind of God—which S. Peter identifies with *the word of good tidings* preached to men (*I. Peter* 1:23–25). The suppression of the prophesyings in Elizabeth's reign, and Archbishop Bancroft's* belittling of the preacher's office in James I.'s time, were of a piece with that magic-loving temper which still obtains in some quarters to-day.

Though claiming for the Spirit of God free access to all believers for the purposes of mutual instruction, the Separatists were not extreme individualists. During his trial John Penry was asked, "May you teach publicly in the Church, having no public office therein?" To which he replied, "I may, because I am a member thereof, and requested thereunto by the Church, and judged to be, in some measure, endowed with suitable gifts for handling the Word of God." "Then," said his judge, "everyone that will may preach the Word in your assemblies?" "Not so," said Penry. "For we hold it unlawful for any man to intermeddle with the Lord's holy truth, beyond the bounds of his gifts; or for him who is endowed with gifts to preach or teach in the Church, except he be desired and called thereto by the body of the Church."† Here once again we see the true High

* "Pulpit harangues," he said, "are very dangerous." (Neal's *Puritans*, II., p. 15.)

† Brook's *Lives of the Puritans*, II., pp. 54–56.

Churchism of the Separatist polity. Their Assemblies were not collections of self-assertive cranks, each claiming independence of the rest, but societies in whom the Spirit of God moved as the spirit of a man moves in his body, and while one life flowed in all the members, those there were who were called to special honour and special service, and it was the united voice of the Church which summoned them.

CHAPTER III. The Dispersion

These all died in faith . . . having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.—HEBREWS II:13.

*Men they were who could not bend,
Blest Pilgrims, surely, as they took for guide
A will by sovereign Conscience sanctified;
Blest while their Spirits from the woods ascend
Along a Galaxy that knows no end,
But in His glory Who for sinners died.*

—WORDSWORTH (*Ecclesiastical Sonnets*).

Everywhere, O Truth, dost Thou keep watch over all that consult Thee.—AUGUSTINE (*Confessions*, X., 26).

A MODERN scholar, Professor Zahn, in describing the first dispersion of Christians through the persecution which arose on the day of Stephen's death, uses a very happy simile: "It was as though the gardener, who had reared his plants in narrow boxes, had set them in the open garden; only there could they branch out and bear blossom and fruit." The Gardener Who had reared here and there in England little groups of New Testament Churchmen—for such we claim the Separatists were—now uprooted them, with some pain to themselves, and replanted them in the very open garden of the New World. For a time they had a temporary shelter in Holland. England could no longer be their home. For, on April 10, 1593, "heavy decrees," they wrote, "came forth that we should forswear our country and depart, or else be slain therein." Accordingly, in various small bands, they escaped across the North Sea

and founded churches at Middelburg, at Leyden and at Amsterdam. From time to time their numbers were augmented. For James I brought to his throne a very strong disrelish for anything savouring of Presbyterianism, and met all Puritan attempts in that direction with the famous declaration, "No bishop, no king. . . . I will make them conform themselves, or I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse."

The manner of life among the exiles in Holland, their poverty, their modes of worship and of Church discipline, their discussions and their relations with their Dutch neighbours belong to a very important, chapter in our history. For the purposes of this book, however, we need not do more now than draw attention to certain general facts.

There was much persistent desire after the fulfilment of their ideal, and much failure too. Professor Gwatkin has truly remarked: "Persecution. always brings to the front men who manufacture scruples, make divisions, and are hard on the weak and fallen."* It was so among these refugees, more especially in the Church that gathered at Amsterdam. There were sharp contentions leading to divisions and sub-divisions, too much in the manner of the Plymouth Brethren of the nineteenth century. Sometimes the subject of dispute savoured of that preciseness which was so great an offence to the ordinary Englishman. Thus one of the ministers, Francis Johnson, married a well-to-do young widow, whose attire gave great scandal to certain of the Church-members. It was alleged that she wore "corked shoes and an excessive deal of lace . . . a showish hat . . . excessive busks and whalebones in her breast . . . great starched ruffs, and three, four, or five gold rings at once!" Proceedings were taken in the

* *Early Church History, II.*, p. 345.

Church-meeting about her case—far too animated proceedings, leading at last, however, to the signal overthrow of Mrs. Johnson's adversaries and the excommunication of her chief critic. Other scandals there were of more weighty import, difficult enough for us to adjudge, seeing that the evidence lies largely in pamphlets written by reckless Anglican apologists, who, glad of any mud they could find to fling against Separatists, naturally fell into the hands of renegades and interested accusers. Such Anglican apologists, it is to be feared, continue unto this day.*

The Church at Leyden, of which John Robinson was minister, seems to have been preserved from most of the trouble which befell the sister-Church at Amsterdam. And it is with this Church we are chiefly concerned because the main current of our denominational history flows through it. Its leading members all speak of the profit and happiness of their worship, and of the seemliness and order of their discipline. When Edward Winslow, "an able and educated young English gentleman from Droitwich, being on his travels, happened to come to Leyden in 1617, he was so struck with the Christian life of this brotherhood that he cast in his lot with them, and not only became a member of the fellowship, but went with them afterwards to New England. . . . Writing a quarter of a century later, he says: 'I persuade myself never people upon earth lived more lovingly together and parted more sweetly than we the Church at Leyden did; parting not rashly in a distracted humour, but upon joint and serious deliberation, often seeking the mind of, God by fasting and prayer, Whose gracious presence was not only found with us, but His blessing upon us from that time until now.'"† Some gracious reality must, indeed,

* See Dr. Powicke's criticism of Prof. Arber in his *Henry Barrow and the Exiled Church of Amsterdam*.

† *The Pilgrim Fathers of New England*—John Brown, D.D., p. 127.

have belonged to the life of the Leyden Church, when a young wealthy Englishman, touring the Continent, could be drawn both from travel and his own home in England to join its membership. Finally, we observe, when in 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers went out from Leyden the magistrates of the city gave them a clean character. "These English," they said, "have lived now amongst us ten years, and yet we never had any suit or accusation against them, or any of them."* That is enough.

Before, however, following further the story of the Fathers thus opened to us, we must go back a little, in order to note an event of subordinate but very real interest. Henry Jacob, an Oxford graduate, ordained in the Church of England, after suffering imprisonment for his advocacy of Church reform, fled to Holland and coming under Separatist influence adopted the Congregational doctrine and joined the Leyden Church. Six years later, in 1616, he returned to England and, after consultation with some of the still imprisoned Separatists in London; gathered and organised a Church which has weathered all the storms of later centuries and, as the Pilgrim Church in the New Kent Road, remains to this day. This Church must have materially helped the cause of Congregationalism as a link of transition between early Separatism and the Independency of a later time. Thus, as Dr. Selbie has lately reminded us, "The Separatist Church at Leyden not only has the glory of founding the Congregationalism of New England, but also contributed to the replanting of Congregationalism in this country."†

Now let us see what were the motives which the Divine Gardener utilised when He planted out these exiled New Testament Churchmen in the big "open garden" of the

* Nathaniel Morton's *New England's Memorial*.

† *Congregationalism*, p. 50.

West. To begin with in Holland, as foreigners, naturally they were at a disadvantage in earning their living: hence their poverty was often great. Then, as the years passed and no hope of any reconciliation with the English Church could be entertained, they grew afraid lest their children should be absorbed in Dutch life—the manner of which did not seem to them to be sufficiently religious—and lose their English culture, possibly becoming unworthy in character too. Not from disloyalty to England, but rather because they loved her with more moral discrimination than did most of her sons, they had been exiled from her shores. They would not willingly lose their English name, nor let their descendants be merged in an alien race. Finally, theirs was the superb ambition to fuse the two great loyalties of their lives, their love of England and, their love of God, in one heroic endeavour—the founding of a new colony, at once English and godly. In the words of one of their number, they were animated by “a great hope and inward zeal of laying some good foundation or at least to make some way thereunto for the propagating and advancing the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of earth; yea, though they should be but even as stepping stones unto others for the performing of so great a work.”*

The most prominent figure among the exiles was John Robinson (?1575–1625). In character and especially in liberality of thought Robinson overtops all the Churchmen of his day. There was a selflessness about the man which in his early manhood was shewn by a generous regard for his opponents. He hesitated before joining the Separatists, being held back by the example of many who had conformed “blushing in myself to have a thought of pressing one hairbreadth before them in this thing, behind whom I knew myself to come so many miles in

* Bradford's *The History of Plymouth Plantation*, p. 24.

all other things; yea, and even of late times, when I had entered into a more serious consideration of these things, and, according to the measure of grace received, searched the Scriptures, whether they were so or no . . . had not the truth been in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, I had never broken those bonds of flesh and blood wherein I was so straitly tied, but had suffered the light of God to have been put out in mine own unthankful heart by other men's darkness."* Many years later, in his last published words, Robinson declared himself in living sympathy with many members of the Church of England, holding with them "the same faith, hope, spirit, baptism, and Lord." "I have always," he said, "in spirit and affection all Christian fellowship with them, and am most ready, in all outward actions and exercises of religion, lawful and lawfully done, to express the same."† It was the government of the English Church and the many survivals of Roman superstition in its services to which he objected. There was so much that was not "lawful," according to the Christian *law of liberty*, that conformity would have been, to him, a sin. Nevertheless, he was under no misapprehensions as to the limitations of his own understanding of the truth. When in 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers, members of his Church at Leyden, were about to set forth upon their momentous journey, Robinson addressed them in language which ever since has been to us the classic illustration of Congregational hospitality of mind. "He charged us before God," says one of the Fathers, "and His blessed angels to follow him no further than he followed Christ. And if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of His, to be as ready to receive it as ever we were to receive any truth by his ministry. For he was very confident the Lord had more

* Dr. Powicke's *John Robinson*, p. 13.

† Powicke, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word.”*

Robinson himself did not accompany the emigrants, though evidently he had a strong longing to do so. Obviously many of the Church at Leyden were unfit for such an enterprise, and it seemed the minister’s duty lay with them. Morton’s *New England’s Memorial* thus pictures the hour of departure: “And the time being come that they must depart, they were accompanied with most of their brethren out of the city, unto a town called Delft Haven, where the ship lay ready to receive them, so they left that goodly and pleasant city, which had been a resting-place above eleven years; but they knew that they were pilgrims and strangers here below, and looked not much on these things, but lifted up their eyes to heaven, their dearest country, where God hath prepared for them a city, and therein quieted their spirits.”

The adventure was great. A short time before, another emigrant ship crossing the Atlantic had lost 130 out of her total 180 passengers. One can well understand, therefore, that before the Pilgrims found that quiet of spirit, of which they speak, there were many tears shed. We catch a glimpse of Robinson falling down on his knees and commending them with fervent prayer to Him Who is able to rule the winds and the sea. They encountered some set-backs at the start. Autumn storms—for it was on September 16 they finally got clear of English ports “shrewdly shook” the ship, making her “upper works very leaky,” but finally on December 21 the whole party (sixty-six men, twenty-six women, ten children) landed at Plymouth Rock on the American coast.

Their subsequent fortunes, seen against the background of that heroic enthusiasm which had moved them to seek another country and to make it, if they might almost a heavenly country, remind us of the contrast presented

* Powicke, *Op. cit.*, p. 105.

between the glowing prophecies of Israel's Return from Babylon in *Isaiah* 40–55, and the somewhat doleful and prosaic sequel narrated in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. The first few years were marked by much hardship. Within a twelve month half of their number perished. It was long before the land of their adoption could seem in any sense a home, except only in this, which was much, that there they were free to worship God as His Spirit led them. How far they profited by that freedom is sharply controverted. Here again, as in the case of the first stage of their exile, when they found liberty in Holland, we shall have somewhat to reckon with, when we come to set out the central principle of Congregationalism, and the lessons our history teaches us. It cannot be denied that the New England Independents were more keen upon establishing their own particular type of worship than upon honouring *the law of liberty* in their dealings with others. As the colony grew, and new streams of emigrants mingled with the original flow of Independency. Robinson's parting counsels to the Pilgrims. were largely ignored. While there is no evidence that the Pilgrim Fathers themselves were guilty of acts of persecution; later annals of the colony are certainly stained with many records of intolerance towards Episcopalians and Quakers. The "more light" Robinson had promised the pioneers did not shine upon their immediate successors when, on an outbreak of an Indian invasion in 1670, they called for a Day of Humiliation and attributed their troubles to "neglect of worship, extravagance in apparel, the wearing of long hair, and lenity towards the Quakers."*

Yet, as has well been pointed out by the Rev. D. Macfadyen,† their ultimate salvation from that religious

* *Cambridge Modern History*, VII., 27.

† *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, X., p. 33.

intolerance which belonged to their age lay in this, that by their principles. of democracy in secular government, and of the headship of Christ in Church government, they possessed potencies. of amendment to which autocracies, whether in State or Church, are generally strangers. At the very worst their records are cleaner and kindlier than those of their enemies in the homeland from which they had been expelled.

CHAPTER IV

Arms and the Man!

Arma virumque cano.—Æneid I, 1.

Cromwell, our chief of men.—MILTON (*Sonnet XVI.*).

Conscience is a personal guide, and I use it because I must use my self; I am as little able to think by any mind but my own as to breathe with another's lungs. Conscience is nearer to me than any other means of knowledge.—NEWMAN (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 389).

—*Conscience revered and obeyed,
As God's most intimate presence in the soul,
And His most perfect image in the world.*

—WORDSWORTH (*The Excursion*, IV).

JOHN ROBINSON'S expectation of more light to break forth from God's holy Word is in sharp contrast to the temper of seventeenth century Anglicanism. The declaration, which still stands at the head of the Thirty-nine Articles in the Prayer Book, had been issued earlier than the reign of Charles I, but was confirmed by him in 1628, on the advice of Archbishop Laud. Designed expressly "for the avoiding of diversities of opinions," it required the clergy to lay aside all "further curious search" in theology and to be content with Truth as set forth in the succeeding Articles interpreted in "the literal and grammatical sense." The interest of Laud did not lie in religion so much as in the Church, He was more concerned with the raiment than with the food of the Body of Christ. In his periodical visitations of the clergy he made inquiries as to all sorts of details relating to public worship: "Was there a font of stone set up in the ancient usual place, a convenient and decent communion-table

standing upon a frame with a carpet of silk or some other decent stuff, and a fair linen cloth to lay thereon at the Communion time?”* His whole system constituted a new Pharisaism—great care concerning the *tithing of mint and anise and cummin*, while *the weightier matters of the law, judgment and mercy and faith* were left undone. It might have been said to him as to them of old, *These ye ought to have done and not to have left the other undone* (S. Matthew 23:23). We look in vain through the records of Laud’s work for any inquiry as to the preaching of the Gospel and the winning of sinners to the Kingdom of God. Indeed, about this time preaching in the parish churches was suppressed in favour of catechising, a substitution of verbal memory-work for the enkindling of man’s deeper life in fellowship with the Eternal Spirit. There can be no doubt that preaching had often been too controversial, but the remedy could never lie in a uniform utterance of certain set words, only in a humbler access to Christ Himself and in a fresh emphasis upon those promises of the Gospel which speak of a leading by the Spirit into all the Truth.

But in fact Laud and his party were wrong in their attitude. S. Augustine in his *Confessions*† describing his appreciation of what was really excellent among the nooks he read before his conversion, observes, “I delighted in them, but knew not whence came all that therein was true or certain. For I had my back to the light, and my face to the things enlightened; whence my face, with which I discerned the things enlightened,

* *The English Church. from the Accession of Charles I to the Death of Anne*—W. B. Button, p. 66. It should be remembered that these inquiries were more or less customary, and in making them Laud simply followed Elizabethan precedents. He innovated so much, however, that had he felt any interest in more important things he would have moved in them also.

† IV., 30.

itself was not enlightened." Such may be said to have been the general attitude of the rulers of the Anglican Church in the seventeenth century. Their main concern was in looking back to what the Councils had declared, and what the Church Fathers had thought, and what decencies of worship had been traditional. Order and decorum, symbolism and the æsthetic element in worship were more to them than progress in the knowledge of God. Though their faces were turned to the things enlightened, they themselves had their backs to the light.

As the Anglican ideal laid increasing stress upon the amenities of worship, the Church naturally drew nearer to Rome. Much controversy resulted concerning the celebration of Communion. In parish churches where Puritan influence operated, either the people sat in their pews and had the bread and wine brought round to them by the minister, or, in one long line they came up to the Table, which previously had been brought into the body of the Church for the purpose, and received the elements as they "ambled"—to use the current term—past it. Laud insisted that the Table should be kept against the East wall, and be regarded as an altar duly fenced in. He made much of a ridiculous story from the town of Tadlow—"a very ill accident on Christmas Day, 1630, by reason of not having the communion table railed in that it might be kept from profanations." It appears that while the minister was in the pulpit, a dog stole the loaf of bread from the table and ran off. The bread was recaptured but found unfit for consecration. No other suitable loaf was to be had in the town! So there was no Communion in Tadlow that Christmas-day!★

Then all communicants were required to kneel in order to receive the elements. Genuflections before the altar

★ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

at other times also were -said to be desirable.* Images and crucifixes, which had been abolished in the first reforming zeal of Elizabeth's time, were re-introduced. In the fuller light which we now possess as to the motives of these "reforms" of worship we certainly must acquit Laud and his royal master of any purpose of re-establishing the authority of Rome in England, or of inculcating that doctrine of the Mass which the Prayer Book had so clearly denounced. But at that time this was not the general opinion. English Protestants had had so much experience of the insincerity† of Romanists, that not unnaturally Laud was suspected of being in the pay of the Pope. One of his colleagues, Bishop Goodman of Gloucester, a preacher before the king, signed all he was required to sign in the way of articles and canons, and when pressed as to whether he had done so from his heart, shuffled, and at length gave up the sham and entered the Roman Communion. Is it surprising that the people feared Laud was a man of the same sort? Acts speak more loudly than articles of religion, and plain men, who saw the bringing out again of ancient priestly vestments, which they had ever regarded as the livery of Rome, and the renewal of bowings before the altar which had always been looked upon as an acknowledgment of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, were scarcely to be blamed if they doubted whither their archbishop was leading them. Reunion with Rome‡ was in fact under discussion. Charles, probably, was favourable, and though Laud warned the king against entering upon any negotiations towards that end, he

* A rubric which declared that "by kneeling at the sacrament no adoration was intended to any corporal presence of Christ," had been struck out from Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book (Neal, *op. cit.*, I., 129). The memory of this declaration and of its cancellation must halve influenced the opponents of Laud not a little.

† *Cf.* Frere, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-1.

‡ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

himself did receive the offer of a Cardinal's rank if he would bring back the schismatic Church of England into the Roman obedience. All these matters, enormously aggravated by popular rumour, created a frenzy of alarm in Protestant England. And well it might in face of the tremendous Catholic Counter-Reformation which was sweeping through Europe at that time. By the manipulation of Politics, and by the devoted labours of men like S. Francis of Sales, who is said to have recovered for Rome 40,000 to 50,000 Protestants, the cause of reaction, with all it meant for civil as well as religious liberty, was a growing menace to the dearest interests of Englishmen. Even when judged by the most charitable standards, one cannot acquit Laud of folly and inconsideration in the ritual movement he so stubbornly pushed forward. And he has to bear the gravamen of yet more serious accusation in respect to the methods by which he prosecuted his policy. For he met all resistance in the spirit of Whitgift, rather than of Hooker. Under, the direction of the Ecclesiastical Courts, fines, imprisonments, and mutilations of the face and ears in the pillory were meted out to such as would not conform.

One result of the new persecution was that a continuous stream of Puritan emigration flowed westwards and fed the Separatist colony in America, In the course of ten or eleven years, says J. R. Green, 20,000 Englishmen crossed the Atlantic. The Divine Gardener was bedding-out His plants more and more extensively. Yet notwithstanding this, quite a large number of people in England were in the habit of openly assembling for worship according to the freer methods of the Puritan ideal. Whereas in James I.'s reign Separatism in England was almost extinct, in the sixteenth year of Charles I Bishop Hall was heard complaining in the House of Lords that there were in London alone as many as eighty congregations

of “sectaries instructed by cobblers, tailors, felt-makers and such-like trash.” There can be no doubt that it was the new Anglican approximation to Rome which provoked these assemblies. As to the quality of their teachers, the good Bishop had probably forgotten, among other values of primitive Christianity lost to his eyes, the connection of a certain carpenter (or builder) and of a tent-maker with those who, called by their opponents a sect, preferred to be known as *The Way*.^{*} At any rate the “trash” complained of proved to be of some substance on the fields of Marston Moor and of Naseby.

England was not content to give the Bishops a free hand in the repression of independent religion. The tide of freedom was rising. The winds of God blew. In the storm that arose both king and bishop went down, leaving behind a maelstrom of conflicting currents not, to be composed into quiet waters for many a long day. It was a tragedy, for certainly virtue was not all on one side. Andrew Marvell’s tribute to Charles in the hour of death might well also have been spoken of William Laud:

He nothing common did, or mean
Upon that memorable scene,
But with his keener eye
The axe’s edge did try.

Pedantic and harsh in his living, Laud died with Christian dignity. The poignancy of the tragedy, as in the earlier tragedy of the conflict of Whitgift with the Separatists, lay in the truth, mournfully clear to us now! that he and those he had persecuted were both anti-Roman, and both believers in the Saviourhood and Kingship of Christ. The Church should ever pray for deliverance from misunderstandings as well as from all uncharitableness.

^{*} Acts 24:14.

In the struggle against the Crown and the Bishops the Puritans had gradually divided into two distinct parties—Presbyterians who looked to Scotland for a Church-model, and Independents, who were the true successors of the Separatists. The Presbyterians at first were the more numerous, and when Episcopacy was abolished they succeeded in setting up their system in London and in Lancashire, as instalments of a Presbyterian State-Church to be erected throughout the country. They predominated also in the famous Westminster Assembly, which sat from 1643 to 1649. The Assembly was called together for the purpose of advising Parliament as to the government and liturgy of the Church of England. Unfortunately it speedily proceeded to pledge itself “to extirpate all heresy and schism.” Only five Independents took part in its deliberations, but these five fought resolutely for liberty of Conscience. One of their number, Jeremiah Burroughes, in a great historic speech declared, “If their congregations might not be exempted from that coercive power of the classes,* if they might not have liberty to govern themselves in their own way, as long as they behaved peaceably towards the civil magistrates, they were resolved to suffer and go to some other place in the world where they might enjoy their liberty. But . . . while men think that there is no way of peace but by forcing all to be of the same mind, while they think that the civil sword is an ordinance of God to determine all controversies of divinity, and that it must needs be attended with fines and imprisonment to the disobedient, there must be a base subjection of men’s conscience to slavery, a suppression of moral truth, and great disturbance in the Christian world.”

Those words form a landmark in the history of free

* classes = plural form of *classis*, an ecclesiastical body, closely resembling a presbytery.

religion, and constitute a decisive breakaway, both from Medievalism and from what lay further back as the heritage of Medievalism, the old idea of the world as parcelled-out under different deities. They were the expression of a new vision of God in His unity and yet manifoldness, a vision which made a man so sure of the strength of Truth that he could view without dismay all conflicts of human opinion, saying with Milton, "Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; whoever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?"* Truth, indeed, the essential truth of Christ, had won so firm a hold upon the Independents that they passed with a leap beyond their Separatist predecessors, beyond Anglican and Presbyterian, too, into the spaciousness of Christian Toleration, which differs from the Toleration of the modern Agnostic in being the fruit of the certainty of knowledge, rather than the desponding corollary of doubt as to the possibility of knowing anything at all.

Naturally the declaration of Burroughes was not allowed to pass unchallenged. The Presbyterians sought not only the complete establishment of their own system, to the exclusion of every other, but they made it evident that no voluntary society affected by heresy could be permitted anywhere within the borders of Britain. Principal Baillie bitterly complained that "the Independents were deviating more and more towards old and new errors, especially liberty of Conscience." Even the saintly Samuel Rutherford took part in some written testimony of the Scottish ministers against toleration—a testimony he described as an "honourable and warrantable truth

* *Areopagitica*.

of Christ.”* Richard Baxter spoke of “universal toleration” as “soul-murder.”† The Presbyterians, in fact, moved on the same plane of thought as the Anglicans, and Milton summed up their position in the well-known line:

New *presbyter* is but old *priest* writ large.

The question of Toleration at last came to a climax when the House of Commons, under Presbyterian influence, passed an Act making denial of the Trinity a capital offence. Problems of religion were now thoroughly tangled up with problems of the Stuart Monarchy, and in the end the double knot was cut by the sword of Cromwell.

The establishment of the Commonwealth meant an ascendancy of the Independents and with this the assertion of religious toleration. In the articles of Government under which Cromwell became Protector, the Christian Religion “as contained in the Scriptures” was “recommended as the public profession.” A declaration of the Council of State in 1653 enacted in its thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh articles “that none be compelled to conform to the public religion by penalties or otherwise; but that endeavours be used to win them by sound doctrine, and the example of a good conversation”; and that “such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ, though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly held forth, shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in the profession of their faith and exercise of their religion, so as they abuse not this liberty to the civil injury of others, and to the actual disturbance of the public peace on their part, provided this liberty be not extended to Popery or Prelacy, or to such as, under a profession of Christianity, hold forth and practice licentiousness.”

* Letter to Mr. John Scot, August 8th, 1658.

† Lecky's *History of Rationalism*, II., p. 75.

The exceptions here made are not altogether unreasonable. Popery was identified with the rule of a foreign power in the possession of both territory and military forces, and, as such, was banned by the common consent of the overwhelming majority of Englishmen. Prelacy, *i.e.*, Anglicanism, was forbidden for two reasons: firstly, because it involved the rule of bishops, an order of men Parliament had abolished; secondly, because experience shewed that Anglicans were perpetually conspiring against the Commonwealth Government, *i.e.*, they were so using their religious facilities as to disturb the national peace. Quakers were not formally excepted from the general toleration, and in fact they suffered very considerably during the Commonwealth. This was largely from their own fault. They were not content to worship quietly by themselves. Frequently they entered the churches—"steeple-houses," as with a foolish scrupulosity they called them—for the express purpose of interrupting the worship. Such proceedings would not be permitted under modern law, and we cannot wonder that in those heated times these and other irregularities of conduct drew upon them excessive punishment and the persecution of mobs.

In all the discussions of the time it was the Independents who led in the way of religious liberty. Cromwell himself continually sought to widen the bounds of freedom. He endeavoured to give the Jews a legal status in England. He connived at much secret use of the now forbidden Prayer Book, and there can be no doubt that, if civil peace had been preserved, he would have been well content to do more than this. Even as it was, with all its limitations, the religious life of England under Cromwell was more quick and various than had ever obtained before within our land, and the bounds of freedom were wider under his rule than under any contemporary European Government.

The National Church was not abolished. The parochial system and tithes remained. The parish churches were served by a mixed body of Presbyterians, Baptists, Independents, and such Anglicans as were willing to forego the Prayer Book. In order to secure a suitable and godly ministry two Boards were established—the Board of Triers, whose duty it was to test a man's qualifications for the ministry, and a Board for dealing with scandalous ministers. Such as were reported to the latter and deemed unsatisfactory were ejected, but given a pension equal to one-fifth of the living they had held. Although fanatics abounded and some of the members of the two ecclesiastical Boards were persons none of us would care to have had to face in the seat of judgment, yet the general policy of Cromwell was to encourage learning and piety. Oxford, with Owen as its Vice-Chancellor, trained many men of deep and ardent Christian faith. From Emmanuel College, Cambridge, a stronghold of Puritanism, originated the Platonist movement with its broad, spiritual and peace-loving influence.* Plans for the creation of a new university at Durham were being prepared when Cromwell died. The Government's genuine interest in religion is shewn by an Act of Parliament passed "for the promoting and propagating of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England," in which colony John Eliot, an Independent minister, had already done magnificent pioneer work among the Red Indians.

Tithes for the maintenance of ministers had been repudiated by the Separatists under Henry Barrow, and were, of course, inconsistent with the principles of Independency. Cromwell himself disliked the system, but his hands were full, and reforms moved slowly; the

* See Dr. Powicke's recent and valuable book, *The Cambridge Platonists*.

question was left open. Those, therefore, of the Independents who objected formed voluntary Churches outside the State-Church. They were, in fact, true to the old ideal of the "gathered Church—" independent of both Government rule and of national taxation. Such Churches selected their own ministers, after prayer and fasting and consultation with one another. Sometimes the ordination-rite was performed by the laity of the calling Church—a beautiful practice in full harmony with scriptural principles of spiritual authority.

In view of the one-sided treatment, by anti-Puritan writers, of the general religious life of the time, it should be said that while undoubtedly there was much misguided repression of games and feastings, there were some things forbidden which we should scarcely wish revived, and there were some relaxations permitted which made for genuine pleasure. Take the question of the theatre. When we hear that Puritans forbade all plays, we think of the pity it would be were we to forfeit the innocent pleasures, which, amongst other less desirable theatrical programmes, are obtainable at the modern playhouse. But plays in that age were not all like Milton's noble masque, *Comus*. When, during Elizabeth's reign, one year the theatres were temporarily closed owing to the plague, a writer in *Holinshed's Chronicle* exclaimed, "Would to God these common plays were exiled for altogether as seminaries of impiety!" There was a filthy lewdness about too many of the performances in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Perhaps the Puritan method with the, theatre was not the best, but neither was it the worst. Happy the generation which can find a better middle path! As far as games, were concerned, Charles Lamb is our authority for saying that during the Commonwealth period apprentices, and others were given every alternate Thursday as an entire holiday for sport and recreation, so that the Puritans

were not altogether the kill-joys they are sometimes supposed to have been.

We may certainly agree, however, that the religious ideal of Puritanism generally, and of the Independent in particular, was by no means a complete response to the legitimate instincts of human nature. The Independent looked for strength rather than for beauty in God's sanctuary. He lacked some of the joyousness of the Christian Religion. The Sabbath was too strictly kept. Public fast-days were more frequent than public thanksgivings. Yet there was a real attempt to diffuse religion into the whole of a man's time, if not into the whole of his nature. Doubtless many a farmer gathered his labourers twice a day for prayer and Bible reading, as was Cromwell's practice in his farming days, not desirous that his fields should be worked in forgetfulness of the great Partner in agriculture. So also when War came, Cromwell would have only godly men in his regiment, feeling apparently that Christian men were the only men to be trusted to handle weapons in so dreadful a business. Later in the Protectorate, character, perhaps too readily indexed under current religious phrases, was a pre-requisite for any civil appointment.

Speaking generally of the religious life of the Commonwealth, there was doubtless, much that lent itself to criticism and ridicule, as petty scrupulosity and undisciplined zeal, but Cromwell himself was one whose spirit moved in a large way, and who, despite all the temptations of his extraordinary position and opportunities, and despite many failings, sought to live after the manner described in the noble words of a preacher before the House of Commons in 1647—Ralph Cudworth: "Christ came not into the world to fill our heads with mere speculations, to kindle a fire of wrangling and contentious dispute among us, and to warm our spirits against

one another, with nothing but angry and peevish debates, whilst in the meantime our hearts remain all ice within towards God, and have not the least spark of true heavenly fire to melt and thaw them. . . . He is the best Christian, whose heart beats with the purest pulse towards Christ; not he whose head spinneth out the finest cobwebs." What is true of Cromwell is true also of large numbers of those he led. The Christ of their vision may have been too much identified with that Lord of the Old Testament who is described as a man of war, but He was, as the Christ of our vision also, a Lord of Holiness and of Truth—above all ecclesiasticisms and earthly dignities—and so manifestly Master that in His Presence no other is worthy of the name, so manifestly Teacher that no other can be called Rabbi. Once again, as our survey of one of the early epochs of Congregationalism comes to its highest viewpoint, we see that the impulse which moved our fathers was one of devotion to Christ, the Son of God.

CHAPTER V

Without the Gate

We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come.—EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 13:10–14.

By cunning to make those things seem the truest which are the fittest to serve our purpose, is a thing which we neither like nor mean to follow.—HOOKER (Ecclesiastical Polity, III., 10.)

IT must be admitted that the kind of Public Worship practised by the Independents of the seventeenth century had two great defects. It was neither beautiful nor evangelistic. So far as Beauty was concerned, it disdained any consideration of Art and valued Music only within very narrow limits. As concerns the Evangel, whilst offering men an impressive and morally searching conception of God, it shewed little of that loving quest of sinners which in the next century wrought the great Methodist revival. We are not surprised, therefore, that the ecclesiastical triumph of Independency was unaccompanied by any popular enthusiasm. With some real, if mild, desire that their fellow-countrymen should be made into saints, the Independent minister yet did not understand that this was not at all the ambition of Englishmen generally. The Church, as it had been for ages before the new light of a translated Bible disturbed

men's minds—the Church with its ceremonies, pictures and miracle-plays, its patronage of sports and its devotion to the Crown, was a more satisfying institution for all those not-overmuch-religious persons, who generally constitute the majority of our nation—the multitudes who, to-day, when births, deaths and marriages occur, have an occasional use for Christian worship, as at least a species of spiritual insurance against the possible existence of a Deity. Such as these in the Commonwealth time, a three-parts Pagan race, were positively repelled by the seriousness of the Independents, and were incapable of appreciating aright the frequent escape of the Puritan spirit into those realms which lie beyond the seen and the temporal.

By such as these the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 was welcomed as an opportunity of throwing off all the new restraints which Puritanism had imposed. And since to Anglicans, as Hooker expresses it, “The general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God Himself,”* there was no ecclesiastical obstacle in meeting the popular demand. The new monarch proved to be a notoriously evil-liver, an adulterer and carouser, who attended to State-affairs in the intervals of his cups, but with Episcopacy came back the doctrine of Impuritanism, and there was no inherent difficulty in making Charles II the Supreme Governor of a Church which was to include bad and good alike.

At first everything appeared to go well. The very indifference of Charles to religion generally made him, quite ready to favour an agreement between Puritans and Anglicans, if such were possible. He desired to be merry himself, and it rather conduced to his own happiness if the people around him could abstain from quarrelling.

* *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I., 8.

In this there was some real element of good-will worthy of our praise. The persecution which now began afresh was not in harmony with his wishes. He was, however, too languid in his better feelings to prevent it.

A series of royal decrees and Acts of Parliament transformed the State-Church once more. The net result of negotiations between Anglicans and Puritans was a confirmation of the position of the former, 600 alterations, mostly verbal, being made in the Prayer-book but generally of an Anti-Puritan character. When this was done an Act of Uniformity was passed, requiring all the clergy to adopt the revised Prayer-book, and on some Lord's Day, before S. Bartholomew's Feast of 1662, to make the following public statement: "I do here declare my unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed in and by the book entitled 'The Book of Common Prayer,' etc.". . . Any minister refusing so to act was required to resign his living. When the day came it was found that close upon 2,000 of the clergy had chosen the latter alternative. Two thousand had not only the sense to see the intellectual impossibility of so complete an affirmation, but also the intellectual honesty to confine their assent to things manifestly true. By so doing they gained the regard of many people who were not particularly religious. Even to an unregenerate generation self-sacrifice always makes its appeal.

The year following, a royal proclamation was issued commanding the attendance of all subjects at church on Sundays, under penalty of a shilling fine for every absence without reasonable excuse. The same year the Conventicle Act was passed, forbidding any Nonconformist meeting of more than five persons, other than members of the same family. In 1665 the Five Mile Act prohibited all Nonconformist ministers and teachers from coming, "unless only in passing upon the road," within that

distance of any city, or town-corporate, or borough sending member to Parliament, or within the same distance of any parish or place where such an one had formerly preached or taught, under a penalty of £40 for every offence. Further, by the Test Act of 1673 all civil, naval or military employment under Government was reserved exclusively for members of the Church of England.

The Act of Uniformity, by which so many godly men were ejected from their homes, recalls the fact that under the Long Parliament many of the Anglican clergy had suffered a similar fate. There were, however, two great differences between the two ejections. In the first place, when the Anglican lost his home and occupation, it was largely because he had already identified himself with the royal tyranny, and thus by his own choice was an enemy of the liberties of his nation; whereas the Nonconformists of 1662 were free from all suspicion of plotting against the Government of that time, which Government, indeed, many of them had, perhaps foolishly enough, been instrumental in setting up. In the second place, provision, sometimes fairly liberal, and at lowest computed at one-fifth of the income of the living vacated, was granted by the Long Parliament to those thus dispossessed; while those who were cast out in 1662 were denied any financial help whatsoever.* Then on the top of their penury came further disqualifying penalties, charged with bitter privation and insult. The Five Mile Act made them veritable outcasts, heathen—in the old sense of the word, men fit for the heath but not for the town—pariahs from society, religious lepers who must not approach the goodlier haunts of men, lest they should spread a pestilence there.

* It is right, however, to note that Charles II disbursed some £500 a year in relief of their distress. This, of course, was a private benefaction and could only go a very little way.

What Parliament did in meting out such treatment to a body of high-minded and scholarly ministers was representative of the mind of a part—happily only of a part—of the nation. It became the fashion with Anglicans to hurl coarse jests and contumely at all who had in any way upheld the Commonwealth Government and Church. Butler's *Hudibras*, a clever book of rhymes in derision of the Puritan, was the first of a class of literary attacks which have done much to prejudice the mind of our nation against Nonconformity generally. It has only been in modern times that through the more serious work of Carlyle, Macaulay, J. R. Green, Lecky and Gardiner, some justice has been done to those whose obedience to conscience and readiness to suffer the reproach of Christ made them the very salt of our English earth. "It is difficult," says Lecky, "to overrate the debt of gratitude that England owes to her own Non-episcopal Churches and to those of Scotland. In good report and in evil, amid persecution and ingratitude and horrible wrongs, in ages when all virtue seemed corroded and when apostasy had ceased to be a stain, they clung fearlessly and faithfully to the banner of her freedom. . . . Without their assistance English liberty would no doubt have been attained, but no one can say how long its triumph would have been retarded, or what catastrophes would have resulted from the strife. For it is to Puritanism we mainly owe the fact that in England religion and liberty were not dissevered: amid all the fluctuations of its fortune, it represented the alliance of these two principles, which the predominating Church invariably pronounced to be incompatible."*

If, however, we seek any explanation of that peculiar ferocity of persecution from which our fathers suffered,

* *History of Rationalism, II., 177-8.*

it is probably to be found partly in the untaught condition of the typical Anglican conscience of the time, and partly in the provocation of which the Independents and their allies had been guilty. The so-called "revival of piety" under Archbishop Laud had been more ritualistic than ethical, more concerned with postures of prayer than with the diffusion of goodwill. Hence Laud and his accomplices had no hesitation about defacing the image of God in men, by mutilations inflicted with hot irons upon the cheeks, and with knives that dug out the ears, whilst their successors regarded the less grievous offence of those who defaced cathedrals and parish churches as a crime that called for the sternest punishment. In that the Anglicans displayed a moral judgment without perspective or proportion. But we Congregational Churchmen should at least recognise that indignation directed against those who had encouraged or permitted the mutilation of churches, may have been the working of an inarticulate instinct, testifying that God is Beauty as well as Truth and Goodness, and that any desecration of a house of public prayer is an affront to Him. Such a feeling, coupled with a natural and quite legitimate dislike of any curtailment of amusements and festivities attributable to Nonconformist influence, goes far to explain, though it cannot justify, the persecuting zeal of the Restoration Parliament.

The effects of these intolerant Acts of Charles II's reign were as might have been expected. Persecution may be injurious to those who are its intended objects. It is generally more hurtful to those who dodge its blows. Most of all it injures those who practice or approve it. Amongst the conforming ministers were many who, denying their own convictions, became henceforth useless for all spiritual purposes in the Church. A treatise, published in 1663, entitled, *Ichabod, or Five Groans of the Church*, the authorship of which has been ascribed to

Bishop Ken, lamented the low moral type of very many of those who conformed. The writer speaks of the "number of young ministers now ordained, often unsettled, rash and inexperienced, some even men expelled from college, many unlearned."* In the *Diary of Philip Henry* we read, "It is observed of many who have conformed of late, and fallen from what they formerly professed, that, since their so doing, from unblamable, orderly, pious men, they are become exceedingly dissolute and profane." Such degeneration ever accompanies the violation of conscience. Other conformists there were of a different temper, men who saw in the new order of things the victory of their own opinions. Many, of course, rejoiced with trembling and made an honest religion out of their now-permitted ritualisms. But others, again, excited by victory, carried themselves with a domineering pride and dealt out excommunications upon the least occasions of offence. Samuel Pepys has some strong things to say of these very priestly priests in his diary of November 9, 1663. "I am convinced in my judgment . . . that the present clergy will never heartily go down with the generality of the commons, of England; they (*i. e.*, the commons) have been so used to liberty and freedom, and they are so acquainted with the pride and debauchery of the present clergy." It is worth noting, also, in passing, that in the same entry Pepys testifies to the civil loyalty of many who were called "Fanatiques," stating that these were ever praying for the king, and that in the day of war he would need to turn to them for help.

In our previous survey we have seen what may be described as a series of beginnings in English Congregationalism. At times the movement seemed almost extinct. Then from a fresh combination of circumstances

* *The English Church from the Accession of Charles I to the Death of Anne*—W. H. Hutton, pp. 320-1.

it sprang into activity again. Much in its form was conative. Our fathers were cutting new paths in trackless forests, and at times they diverged futilely and had to turn back. But from 1662 onwards our history is a continuous growth. The Congregational Year Book for 1927 gives 330 now existing churches founded in the seventeenth century, 381 founded in the eighteenth century, 2,441 founded in the nineteenth, and 258 founded in the twentieth. We need follow no further the details of our history so far as England is concerned. It remains to summarise in a few words the actual spirit of the movement, for as that is, so must ever be the law of our future development.

Now, whatever remains obscure as to the details of our beginnings, this at least is evident—that each separate movement was animated by a conscience that turned to Christ for direction and sought the establishment of His Sovereignty. Even the over-emphasis upon Scriptural precedent which characterised the Separatist teaching, and against which Hooker wrote with such splendid but undiscerning elaboration, was at bottom a desire to get back to a Christ Whom the Church had obscured by its ceremonies. The same Christward looking guided John Robinson and the Pilgrim Fathers—in their case with a stress upon the Spirit of Christ as a Living Presence ever able to reveal Himself through the man who stood up to read the Scriptures and to preach in His Name. The Civil War by the smoke of its guns obscured much of the Heavenly Vision, for men were then at deadly grips with one another for civil as well as for religious liberty. Hence the Independency of the Commonwealth was nourished too much by the religion of the *Book of Judges* and too little by the Sermon on the Mount. Yet in the dying words of Oliver Cromwell,* “He that was Paul’s Christ

* Carlyle’s *Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches*, V, 149.

is my Christ too," we may see something of the better spirit of the Independency he represented, as one may look through the breaking of mist over a river and see the drift of its current. Moreover, it can at least be said for those who followed with Cromwell that, if they were stern with their fellows, they were sterner with themselves, that so casting out all ungodliness, their communion with God might be as taintless as the pellucid waters that wash some far-off tropical shore where no human footstep ever falls. Finally, not even our harshest critics can fail to see the Christwardness of the men who came out from the English Church in 1662. The substance of all their objections to the Prayer Book lay in this that the formularies and rites of the Church diverted men from the Saviour, and overloaded the communion of saints with organisation that materialised life. Nothing but the Spirit of Christ would have sufficed them in face of the obloquy and poverty they chose. They went out from Anglicanism, having an altar whereof they had no right to eat which served the parish church, an altar without the camp, a place of sacrifice where Christ Himself shared their reproach, as they were sharing His, and looking for an abiding city, not then present but yet to come, from which no Parliament Act could ever exclude them.

CHAPTER VI

Crown Rights of the Redeemer in Scotland

There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland, that is King James, the head of the Commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject King James VI is, and of whose Kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member.—ANDREW MELVILLE, preaching in 1596 before King James.

A man (Carlyle wrote in 1866) who awoke to the belief that he actually had a soul to be saved or lost was apt to be found among the Dissenting people and to have given up all attendance at kirk.—FROUDE's *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life*, I., p. 11.

IN a recent exposition of the Congregational Faith* Professor Micklem points out that its root lies in the main principle of the Reformation. "Luther proclaimed open access to God through Christ without necessary mediation of Church, priesthood, or intercession of the saints. Every believer, in Luther's thought, possesses Christ for himself, has a personal, and intimate relationship to Christ, and receives direct from Christ all necessary succour and guidance for life and death. This doctrine is accepted by all Protestant Churches in so far as they stand in the Protestant succession. But owing to some curious limitation of Protestant thought this doctrine of liberty has rarely been extended from the Christian individual to the Christian group." That extension has, however, been made by those who hold the Congregational Faith. They have carried the principle of the Reformation to its logical end.

* *The Expository Times*, January 1927, p.167.

In Scotland, as in England, the Reformation was diverted by nationalist conceptions. It seemed, at first, as though the movement would proceed upon Congregational lines. In *The Confession of Faith professed and believed by the Protestants within the Realm of Scotland*, commonly called *Knox's Confession*, ratified by Parliament in Edinburgh, 17 August 1560, three notes of the true kirk are clearly stated. These notes are "neither antiquity, title usurped, lineal descent, place appointed, nor multitude of men" . . . but, "first the true preaching of the Word, of God . . . secondly, the right administration of the Sacraments . . . lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed, and virtue nourished." It is added, "Wheresoever then these former notes are seen, and of any time continue, be the number never so few above two or three, there, without all doubt, is the true kirk of Christ, Who, according to His promise, is in the midst of them (*cap.* 18.)" That, as far as it goes, is Congregationalism. Very notable is the same position in *The Book of Discipline*, also largely Knox's work, published in the same year. The duty of the individual Church to appoint its minister, for which the English Separatists had so strongly contended, was here also put in the foreground. "It appertaineth to the people, and to every several congregation, to elect their minister." Difficulties are considered, but again the *Book* declares, "It must be altogether avoided that any, man be violently intruded or thrust. in upon any congregation. This liberty must be carefully reserved to every several congregation, to have their votes and suffrages in election of their ministers (iv)."

There was, however, one fundamental difference between Knox's position and that of the English Separatists. The latter, whilst believing in the existence of an invisible Catholic Church of all the saints, held that a local and

visible Church must be composed of believers alone. Knox, too, affirmed belief in a Catholic Church, declaring it to be an invisible company of elect souls “known only to God, who alone knoweth whom He has chosen (*cap. xvi.*)” He clearly distinguished it from the several kirks visible “such as was in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus and other places in which the Ministry was planted by Paul (*cap. xviii.*)” But in his teaching the ministry and not the membership constituted the visible Church. Preaching, sacraments, discipline—all ministerial functions—rightly maintained, were the pledge of the Church’s existence, and every parishioner had his place in its membership and was subject to its discipline; for in Scotland, as in England, the dominant party identified the Church with the nation. The outcome of this was that Knox retreated from his position in regard to the calling of ministers, and Congregationalism was, surrendered. There followed evil results in the immediate life of the Church (for the alternative to the Congregational appointment of ministers was the rule of wealthy individuals) and consequences of heart-burning and disruption in the centuries to come.

Probably it was the influence of Knox’s political allies in the nobility which occasioned this retrogression. In any case, from this and similar causes, Scottish State-Church Presbyterianism, as time went by, tended more and more to become a tepid and worldly affair. The parish kirk, stripped of its ancient ceremonies, lost much of the appeal which Catholic ritual had made to men’s instinctive apprehensions of the Divine Glory, and took on the gun-metal colour of intellectualism, impotent to attract the sinner, or to reveal the winsomeness of the Grace of God. The religious struggles of the Southern kingdom, however, delayed the spiritual decay of the Scottish Church, and the full consequences of the deflection from Congregationalism were not apparent until the 18th century.

The condition of the Church of Scotland as that era dawned is reflected in many contemporary writings. In the ranks of the clergy were men of great ability and learning, men of society, too, carrying themselves with dignity, "in blue English broadcloth, silk stockings, and buckled shoes," their wigs well-powdered and curled-impressive figures as they walked, with their gold-headed canes, down the High Street, Edinburgh, on Assembly Day.* Some acquired the fame of combining delightful pulpit eloquence with the ability to drink, erect upon their feet, such quantities of wine as prostrated their lay brethren beneath the table. One there was, the Rev. Robert Wallace, D.D., who distinguished himself as a divine, a mathematician, and as the author of a treatise upon dancing. Such men as these were the rulers of Christ's Church in Scotland, gentlemen competent to all occasions other than those when a sin-burdened or sorrowful soul might ask of them the Way of God. Yet troubled men and women existed in their thousands then, as now, and it was in fulfilment of a ministry that concerned itself with needs of human nature more fundamental than those of our intellectual life, or of our social intercourse, that new communions began to arise.

In 1719 John Glas, was ordained parish-minister at Tealing, near Dundee. In the course of his catechetical work, being led to make a careful study of the subject of Church and State, he came to the conclusion that there was no warrant in the New Testament for a national Church, that the magistrate, as such, had no place in a Church of Christ nor any right to punish for heresy, and that the true reformation could not be carried out by political weapons, but only by the word and spirit of

* Graham's *Scottish Men of Letters*, p. 81.

Christ.* Beginning to teach these things Glas naturally roused a storm of opposition. His father called him an Independent and an Ishmaelite—apparently synonymous terms of reproach. His father-in-law declared that the reformation he sought would never take place. But Glas persevered and formed a society of believers, which gradually drew adherents from other parishes, upon a basis of fellowship and faith in Christ. A little later this society adopted monthly communions (afterwards weekly), with collections for their poor, and generally made a brave endeavour to emulate the type of Church exhibited in the New Testament. For such proceedings Glas was prosecuted by his Synod, and, in 1730, deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland. Nine years later this sentence was recalled, but by that time he had committed himself irrevocably to Independency. A man of great preaching power and excellent character he founded about a dozen churches in Scotland and two in England, all upon a basis of Congregationalism, although not so called.

In 1768 a new movement arose, known now as that of the Old Scots Independents, led by two Fifeshire ministers, James Smith and James Ferrier, who, having adopted Congregational principles as a result of New Testament research, severed their connection with the Church of Scotland. Both men regarded the Civil establishment of a Church as inconsistent with its spiritual nature, and affirmed the competency of each congregation of believers to manage its own affairs through the Presence of Christ at their head. In communion with them a number of other churches sprang up, mostly through a sense of dissatisfaction with the Church of Scotland. Some of these merged in the Glasite churches and with other obscurer communions.

* Dr. James Ross' *A History of Congregational Independency in Scotland*, pp. 25–6.

Both the Glasites and the Old Scots Independents declined in numbers after a time, and as separate denominations they have virtually died out. Their history is instructive. Originating in the desire of godly men to attain a warmer and purer life than seemed possible then in the Church of Scotland, they earnestly sought in the New Testament for the primitive Church-type, holding that this alone was legitimate. They seem, however, to have exalted the letter above the spirit of Scripture. They were careful to obtain a plurality of elders in each church, and to practice weekly communions, and they even descended to the bathos of the kiss of charity, because all these things seemed to have obtained in Apostolic churches. Unfortunately they lost sight of more important concerns. It is by their possession of the Spirit of the Redeemer that churches live. Once let them care more for their own edification and preciseness than for the salvation of mankind and they lose the controlling touch of the mind of Christ, and tend to subdivide and die. Thus the absence of missionary enthusiasm in the Glasite churches and their allies is sufficient explanation of their disappearance.

One thing, however, these early movements towards Congregationalism reveal—an insurgent desire for spiritual life beating against the deadly, moderatism of the Scottish State-Church, and feeling for a way which should lead into the blessing promised to those who believe in Christ.

1789 is a world-date. It marks the beginning of the French Revolution, an event the explosions of which reverberated in every corner of our country. A blow had been struck in the potent triune name of Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood. Groups of ardent men, known as “Friends of the People,” were formed all over Great Britain to discuss political, social and religious questions. Amongst the multitudes of books written about the Revolution, Wordsworth’s poem *The Prelude* is one of the more important

for its vivid pictures of English life and feeling at the time, and for its sympathetic reflection of the hopes kindled in France by the fall of the Monarchy. Words worth himself felt all the thrill of a new era. It was of his own youthful heart he wrote:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven!

The world, shaken by earthquake, appeared likely to reduce all its institutions to ruin in order to build all afresh. It was

a time
In which apostasy from ancient faith
Seemed but conversion to a higher creed.

So it seemed even to an elderly retired naval officer, Robert Haldane, a man of ample means living on his estate at Airthrey, near Stirling. It was the excitement of the French Revolution, he averred, which aroused him from the sleep of spiritual death.* That excitement travelled and retravelled through his soul during all these fateful years. He had never been without some religious feelings, but it was not until 1795 that, whilst walking through the woods of Airthrey, in conversation with a devout artisan, he learnt the way of God more carefully. That was the hour of his new birth.

A year before this, his brother James, also a naval officer, while reading the Bible in his cabin on board ship at Gosport, received similar illumination, and shortly after retired from the Service.

Let him that heareth say, Come. That is ever the law for the redeemed soul. The cry which had fallen upon Robert Haldane's ears inviting him to come in faith to Christ was a call to be passed on to others. Instantly he set

* *Lives of Robert and James Haldane*, p. 74.

himself to consider the needs of distant lands, where oftentimes his ship had touched. Both brothers sought earnestly a way of service in the East, but the opposition of the East India Company was fatal to their schemes. Another work of God, lying at their very doors, was to claim them. Instead of a foreign mission there arose, largely through their labours, "The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home." The two brothers Haldane, and John Aikman (a retired West Indian merchant of like spirit with themselves), working for a time with a young Independent theological student, Joseph Rate, busied themselves in promoting Sunday Schools (then a novelty) and in touring through Scotland in a light open carriage, carrying bundles of tracts and pamphlets, preaching wherever they could find accommodation—in any sort of building, on village-greens, under the shadow of market-crosses, on river-banks and by the sea-shore. Sometimes as many as 6,000 persons gathered to hear them. The burden of their cry was ever the Wrath to Come, and Jesus, the Way of escape. James Haldane appears to have been the most successful of these preachers. There was about his addresses such a note of authority as astonished men into the belief that they were being personally addressed, so that they grew afraid their very names would next be spoken.

It was out of this evangelistic movement that Congregationalism arose in Scotland—an indigenous Church, having little assistance from anyone South of the Border, until the work was well afoot. There does not appear to have been any thought at first of creating Churches, outside the Church of Scotland, but practical experience shewed the impossibility of putting the new wine into old wine-skins. The official Church of Scotland was unsympathetic. In 1799 its General Assembly authorised an admonition to be read in all parish churches denouncing Sunday Schools and lay preaching. The admonition

even expressed suspicion that behind the new religious movement was another directed against "our civil constitution," nothing less indeed than "a secret democracy and anarchy!" In such circumstances it was inevitable that those whose lives had been regenerated through these lay-preachers should organise a communion of their own. And it was perhaps natural that for some years to come the alienation of the educated ministry of the Presbyterian Church should cause these simple men and women, who had been brought to Christ by laymen, to look with distrust upon any College-trained preachers. That meant a grievous loss. The new churches left to themselves, though nourished in all the essential truths upon which our salvation depends, blundered into most of the literalisms of the Glasites. Separations occurred. The Haldanes turned Baptist. The Churches they had founded, without their generous help, became very poor in material resources. From this condition deliverance was reached at last through the founding of the Congregational Union of Scotland, leading on to amalgamation with a kindred denomination, the Evangelical Union.

These later developments, however, do not concern us now. The brief survey we have taken shews what was revealed also by our previous examination of the beginnings of Congregationalism in England, namely that the Congregational method is wont to arise naturally out of any experience of redemption through the Spirit of God working according to His own counsels, and often choosing as instruments of Grace those whom the great law-established Churches would bind in conscience, or pass by with disdain. When the lineaments of the Face of Christ are veiled through the worldliness of those who should be His exponents, the outgoings of human souls in quest of the Saviour instinctively draw together in new centres of the Divine Society.

CHAPTER VII

The Principle of the Congregational Churches

Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.—S. MATTHEW 18:19–20.

Where Jesus may be, there is the Catholic Church.—IGNATIUS (*Epistle to the Smyrneans, VIII.*).

Where only three are and they but laymen, yet there is the Church.—TERTULLIAN (*Exhort. ad Castit. c. 7.*).

I believe in the Holy Catholic Church.—THE APOSTLES' CREED.

THERE are certain plants and trees which have what are known as “adventitious roots,” *i. e.*, roots developed at different points along the stem, or, in the case of a tree, from the trunk and branches, in addition to, or in place of, the main root. The name is not a very happy one, for it seems to imply that the root thus described is something accidental, if not abnormal, whereas the adventitious root is often of vital importance for the propagation of the species. Amongst trees the most conspicuous instance of this kind of growth is the banyan tree of the tropics. When its stem has attained a height of some fifty feet it sends out lateral branches in all directions, and each branch will drop tendrils to the ground, which, when they touch the soil, cling, and hold, and form a new root. The new stem thus created rapidly increases in diameter. Gradually there will be developed in this way, around the original trunk, hundreds and even thous-

ands of new trunks. One banyan tree on the Nerbuddah is said to have three hundred large and three thousand small stems, and to be capable of sheltering thousands of persons beneath its shade.

Now the effect of the adventitious roots in such a tree is twofold. They add to its stability against the wrenching power of tempests by giving it a myriadfold grip of the soil, and, at the same time, the upper branches and foliage receive new sources of nourishment, so that if decay should set in at the main trunk the tree is still fed and survives,

Robert Southey closes a beautiful description of the banyan tree with the words,

So like a temple did it seem, that there
A pious heart's first impulse would be prayer.

That is a very happy simile. The banyan tree is an image of the living Temple of God, in which the Congregational Churches have their assured place. In the Catholic (*i.e.*, Universal) Church of Christ we have a definite historic connection and also we have our own immediate and independent rooting in Christ. Both of these we need.

1. Let us not forget our interest in the Past. Let us ever remember that the founders of our oldest Churches had been members of the State Church of their country. They had received from that Church an original deposit of truth. The Bible, as edited and translated by former Churchmen, had been put into their hands. The Sacraments; which enshrined so much Gospel truth, had been handed down to them through a long line of Christian generations. Indeed, their very life-blood, their language, the quality of their minds, their ethical standards, their hopes of Heaven had all been in some measure Christianised by the centuries of our era behind them.

Born into life!—man grows
Forth from his parents' stem,
And blends their bloods, as those
Of theirs are blent in them;
So each new man strikes root into a far fore-time.

Therefore whatever proper pride the modern Anglican feels as he surveys the glories of the ancient abbeys of our land we also most legitimately may feel: our ancestors no less than his built them. Whatever true fame has gathered about the names of Ridley and Latimer and Tyndale and Wycliffe and Anselm and Lanfranc and Bede is our heritage no less than his. We, too, are sprung from the Church which nourished them. And, indeed, through the gateway of the mission of Augustine of Canterbury have come to us, as well as to him, the tidal saps of the ancient Catholic Church. We are rooted in historic Christianity.

2. But we have also our independent rooting in Christ. So living is this Tree of Life God has planted, and which yet will overspread the world, that the whole of its life lies in its every drop; it can convert wind-tossed wisps of green into sinuous upholding trunks and, for the glory and enrichment of the Spirit, surround its first main stem with daughter-stems, of kindred quality. Every individual company of believers in Christ has the power of this independent rooting in Him. For assurance of the grace of Christ is a matter of too vital importance to be tied up to anyone historic channel, The moulding touch of time, the hourly impact upon us of the passing world, the ceaseless coral-like upbuilding of character, the surge of ancient instinct in our flesh making for us a daily probation, the weightiness of sorrow, the clouds that overhang the end of our earthly travel—all these create too vast an interest in Christ's Gospel, for us to be able safely to depend alone upon the precarious and controverted

testimonies of past communions; we need imperatively a direct contact with a living Lord.

And, indeed, it is well for the continuance of Christ's Faith in the Earth that its maintenance has not been dependent upon the sequences of History. It was a gracious sapling our Lord planted in Jerusalem, but since its first witness was given, has it been worth so very much? At Antioch a root was dropped, and one at Alexandria, but does much life flow to us to-day from these ancient centres? The plain truth is Christianity in the Orient lands of its first up springing is badly decayed. Rome passed on to us the true life, but for most Englishmen Rome long ago ceased to be the channel of spiritual quickening. And in the 16th century Canterbury, too, as a spiritual source, had largely ceased to function. Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, Canterbury—through them all had been transmitted some streams of Christian influence and energy, but they were as the light of distant stars which, once glorious in the sky, have waned and well-nigh perished. Transmitted historic graces needed supplementing with some fresh movement from the primal source of Christian life. So it was that our Separatist forefathers were right when they cried, "Reformation without tarrying for any." They felt that the eternal welfare of a human soul was not to wait upon the dubious religion of political cabinets, or to be dependent upon the sluggish and adulterated pieties of an abject Bench of Bishops—the pitiful creatures of an imperious and secular-minded woman. Christ never said to His People: In your souls' urgent needs meet together for prayer, but only when Peter is present with you, or when Peter shall send some John Mark to represent him. The great declaration ran simply: *If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there*

am I in the midst of them! That is the *Magna Charta* of Congregationalism; that embodies the principle of the Congregational churches. In that faith our churches were founded, and by it until this hour they have lived and borne fruit.

We must, however, now make some endeavour, rightly to understand the meaning of this wonderful declaration of the Lord's Presence with His disciples. We notice, first, that there is no sign He was thinking exclusively of the time to come when He should be exalted in His risen glory. The verbs He uses are in the present tense—*are gathered together, there am I*. The saying, therefore, had its applications in the days of His ministry, while as yet His body was subject to the limitations of mortal life. It may be asked in that case, were there in those days any gatherings of disciples other than those around His visible form? There are no traces of any ordered meetings of the kind, but that Jesus had His secret and unattached followers, as well as the Apostles and avowed friends, is evident from various references in the Gospels.* Probably there were very many who, tied by circumstances to their own localities, were unable to keep in touch, with the body of disciples who accompanied Him in His continual wanderings—men and women into whose neighbourhood He had come only once and again, but who ever after, amid their hard home toils, remembered the sight of His face, and the accent of His voice, as He spoke to them of the Father. To such His treasured words, and the recollection of His gracious bearing, would be the theme upon which they would most love to meditate and converse, when the day's tasks were done and they could sit together in the gateways and courts of their crowded towns, or wander under the starlight of the countryside. Would not the declaration of His Presence be for them as much as for any?

* E.g., *Mark* 9:38, *Luke* 10:38, *Luke* 22:10–13.

But if so, in what sense could it be true that He was with them when He was, for instance, beyond Jordan and they in Galilee?

Now there are certain elect souls to whom God has given a rare and mystic temperament, men and women peculiarly susceptible to what we may call the wireless messages of sympathy, persons who need less than their fellows the materials of communication in order to receive impressions from distant friends, or to transmit their own loving regard and, goodwill. We do not require, therefore, to claim for our Lord, in this case, any absolutely super-human quality in order to understand His promise for His scattered followers in the days of His flesh. He supremely had the mystics openness of nature and power of self-diffusion. Thus to the astonishment of Nathanael He said *Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.** He was aware of the death of Lazarus before any human tidings of the event reached Him.† And again, He seems to have known of the success of the Mission of the seventy disciples before they returned to Him.‡ These things indicate our Lord's power of withdrawal from the pressure of external circumstances into a world of spiritual existences. They connect with His intimate communion with the Father. None of us can measure that communion or limit its range, but we can faintly apprehend that, by the deep and passionate joy of His heart, Jesus was often drawn into the very experiences of the Father, and was able to hear, as the Father heard, the crying-out of human souls for deliverance from sin and sorrow. Would not this intensification of His spirit in fellowship with God enable Him also to hear the faintest whisper of His disciples' prayers, however far-separated they, might be from His bodily Presence?

To us these considerations may be useful in indicating

* *John* 14:8. † *John* 11:14. ‡ *Luke* 10:17-18.

the way in which we are to think of His Presence with us now. Possibly it is helpful to some to dwell in thought upon the labours of famous artists who have represented Him upon their canvas. No face has been so often, or so lovingly portrayed. It is natural to conceive of Him as the *Altogether Lovely*, and there are some pictures of Christ which move us to the depths of our nature. The very dress of an Eastern man suggests to Western minds ideas of beauty and spirituality. Instinctively, therefore, we have thought of our Lord as a man of majestic appearance. But such imaginary pictures are not quite what we want in order to possess the full value of His promised presence. An exquisite passage of *In Memoriam* may perhaps shew us a more excellent way. Tennyson sings of a tranquil summer night spent in the open air, on the lawns and in the fields about his old home. He had been sitting with friends, absorbing the beauty of the landscape in the deepening dusk, an undercurrent of thought about his dead friend Hallam flowing through his mind.

But when those others, one by one,
 Withdrew themselves from me and night,
 And in the house light after light
Went out, and I was all alone,

A hunger seized my heart; I read
 Of that glad year which once had been,
 In those fall'n leaves which kept their green,
The noble letters of the dead:

★ ★ ★ ★

So word by word, and line by line,
 The dead man touch'd me from the past,
And all at once it seem'd at last
The living soul was flash'd on mine,

And mine in his was wound, and whirl'd
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out
The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance,
The blows of Death.

Now have not we some parallel experience, when, meeting in our Lord's name, a love of Him subsumes all we say about commonest things, and, turning to those truly ever-green leaves, the Gospels, His recorded words and deeds come back to us glowing with Divine reality? Then all at once the living soul of Jesus is flashed upon ours and we in Him are borne upward to God. We cannot explain it, but the way to the consciousness of His Presence is through our diligent and loyal study of His words and all His ministry and dying. We look up from the sacred page and He is there. We know Him by the beating of our hearts, by the falling away of our worldly desires, by the goodwill that begins to glow in us towards others, by the peace and gratitude which replace the strain and fretfulness of the intercourse of daily life. He is there, and our prayers, purified and enkindled by His Presence, now rise to the Father in Heaven with an unhindered swiftness and certainty of hope.

Something of all this we may know when we are apart from each other, but much more when we meet with those likeminded. Then the grace, as S. Paul writes, is *multiplied through the many*.^{*} Cell is linked to cell in the growing battery which generates spirit-power. And so we come at last to realise the truth of another great saying of the apostle: *Now the Lord (i.e., Jesus) is the Spirit*.[†] There are not two Heavenly Beings with whom we have to

^{*} II. Corinthians 4:15.

[†] II. Corinthians 3:17.

deal—our Saviour and *another Comforter*. For the otherness of the Comforter to us lies only in the mode of manifestation. The Presence is Spirit, and we are spirit, and “Spirit with spirit can meet”—until we are ready to say yet further:

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands
and feet.

The two modes of our apprehension of the Presence of Christ in the assembly of believers are, then, the study of His mind as it is recorded in the New Testament, and faith in Himself as *even now living* in the Glory of God. For us, even more truly than for Nathanael under the fig tree, or for Mary and Martha as they sat in their darkened home thinking sorrowfully of His loving ways, or for the man with the pitcher going his lonely way through the crowded streets of Jerusalem to the well—a solitary disciple whose loving care kept ever ready a guest-chamber for Jesus—He is indeed a real Presence, whenever we meet, not only; at the Communion table, but also in any act, of common worship, offered in His Name. For whatever power of self-diffusion was His in the days of His flesh He has ascended now, *far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things*.^{*} He has passed to the centre that therefrom He might use every radius to the most distant circumference of human life. And nothing but, our own wilful neglect of Him, or the limit we put to the power of faith, can hinder us in our assemblies as churchmen from tasting the fulness of God’s Grace.

In this confidence we are strengthened by the testimonies of the Past. Lecky in his *History of European Morals* (ii. pp. 8 and 9) says very nobly that the life and character of Christ have been the “well-spring of whatever is best and purest in the Christian life.” He adds: “Amid all

^{*} *Ephesians* 4:10.

the sins and failings, amid all the priestcraft and persecution and fanaticism that have defaced the Church, it has preserved, in the character and example of its Founder, an enduring principle of regeneration." That is to say, the earthly records of Jesus—His teaching, His ministry, His Passion, His Victory—contain a vitalising principle, by which every declension and failure may be transcended and we ourselves rise again to higher things. More recently, Dr. T. R. Glover, also speaking with the authority of one who knows history, has said: "Wherever the Christian Church, or a section of it, or a single Christian, has put upon Jesus Christ a higher emphasis—above all where everything has been centred in Jesus Christ—there has been an increase of power for Church, or community, or man. . . . On the other hand . . . where Christ is not the living centre of everything, the value of the Church has declined, its life has waned."*

The warning contained in these last words should teach us afresh the tremendous importance for character and happiness of this Principle of the Presence of Christ, by which our churches have come into existence and through which they continue as spiritual institutions. Here we reach the one consideration which determines membership. We require of our members, in Congregational Churches, no elaborate confession of faith, no controversial theology, nothing but what the Apostles required of all who would enter their fellowship. If, says S. Paul, thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.† Because Jesus is the very Life of the Church, they who would enter in must openly acknowledge Him *as Lord, i.e.*, as the Divine ruler of their life, as One to whom they give the obedience which men owe to God, and must inwardly think of Him as the Conqueror of Death,

* *The Jesus of History*, pp. 3-4.

† *Romans* 10:9.

as One alive for evermore. Obedience to, and Faith in Christ—open and sincere—these are the requisites for Church-membership. Anything less than these might possibly, for a time, increase the number of our members, but would inevitably diminish the quality of our life and introduce elements of dissolution.

Three important truths remain to be noted.

Firstly, although, as we have just seen, the Apostolic terms of Church-membership may be stated broadly as obedience and faith towards Jesus in His risen life, yet experience points us to a certain aspect of His person and work as possessing peculiar power. Our brief survey of Congregational history has shewn us how in each of the early beginnings of our system the human motive was a desire to realise Christ as Redeemer. It was not that men were drawn to seek Him because He had taught certain general truths, like the Fatherhood of God and Human Brotherhood. A revelation of personal goodness, awaking a corresponding consciousness of sin, drove them to seek sanctity in Him, and it was as a Holy Saviour He came, incarnating Himself in them that so they might obtain that purity they yearned after, and themselves become transmitters of purity to others. Essentially it was the moral passion of a moral God in them which called their churches into existence and gave them unquestionable rights, And we shall find the salvation of our own churches to-day, if we keep true to the Saviourhood of Christ, which is more than, His mere Teachership, as His central significance for a sinful race. *Our Redeemer from everlasting is Thy name.*

Secondly, just because we have seen so plainly the Divine Presence in our history constituting our churchmanship, however cordial may be our feeling towards other communions, we who have received our knowledge of Christ in Congregational Churches would be slighting the Holy Spirit if we failed in loyalty to them. The Anglican

rightly venerates the continuity of his Church-life from age to age—rightly, so far as he honestly sees it and feels its profit. But so also do we, and there is a glory transmitted to us from the gathered churches of the Separatists in Southwark, and Gainsborough, and Scrooby, and Leyden, as truly as that associated with the splendours of Canterbury and Westminster. We cannot be recreant to our past. It was Christ who fashioned our fellowship in those great centuries of English expansion and English battling for freedom, and to-day, with all their multiplied centres, those fellowships remain a heritage we hold in trust for Him.

Lastly, as Ignatius nobly said—and the words are perhaps nobler in themselves than he purposed—“Where Jesus may be there is the Catholic Church.” For Catholicity, the principle of comprehension, belongs naturally to any life that is given by Jesus. *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.* He knows nothing, and we should know nothing, of “sects” meeting in “conventicles” or “Little Bethels,” or any like terms of reproach. In days long before the erection of special places of worship, when the Church had to find hospitality in any available human dwelling, it was said to those who gathered for worship in Christ’s name: *Ye are come—not, ye shall come—unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel* (*Heb. 12:22–4*). For they that are in Paradise love their Lord too much not to go with Him where He goes, and in the Unity of the Divine Life there can be no sundering of persons, so that our fellowship even here upon earth is in the strange and sweet society of the Godhead and all the company of Heaven.

Further, although we cannot trace out the courses of that river of grace which often flows hiddenly between church and church, yet the fact to which such movements as those of the great Methodist Revival in the 18th Century bear witness, namely, the simultaneity of quickenings at different church-centres that have no conscious intercourse with each other, points to a community of the Spirit in all believers, and thus is afforded a second evidence of the Catholicity of the Church in every assembly where Christ is sought as Saviour and Lord.

We stand here in agreement with one of the most eminent of the Elizabethan Puritans, Walter Travers, when he declared, "Such is the communion of saints, as that what solemn acts are done in one true church of Christ, according to his word, are held lawful in all others,"*—that is to say, should be held lawful. For the local church is actually the Catholic Church in one place of its manifestation. "The faith of a Christian," says an eminent theologian, "sees in every Christian assembly, gathered in the Spirit, the whole of Christianity, the people of God, the total community. On that ground every assembly of Christians, whether small or great, which met in the name of the Lord, was called *ecclesia* (i.e., church), a national assembly of the New Testament Israel."†

Such is our Congregational faith, a faith which helps to give spiritual dignity to all our meetings for worship, or for the service of Christ, and which goes far to cover all the defects of our poor outward equipment

with the gleam,
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.

* *Neal's Puritans, I.*, 407–8.

† Sohm in *The Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics, III.*, 618.

CHAPTER VIII

Devotional Applications of the Principle

*And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul, which in bending upraises it too)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to His feet.*

—BROWNING'S *Saul*.

*Too late loved I Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet
ever new! too late I loved Thee! . . . Thou wast with me,
but I was not with Thee. Things held me far from Thee, which,
unless they were in Thee, were not at all.*—AUGUSTINE'S
Confessions X, 38.

*Cheerfulness in Religion is not only the most lovely, but the
most commendable in a virtuous Person. . . . Those who
shew us the Joy, the Cheerfulness, the Good-humour, that
naturally spring up in this happy State, are like the Spies
bringing along with them the Clusters of Grapes, and delicious
Fruits, that might invite their Companions into the pleasant
Country which produced them.*—ADDISON'S *The Spectator*,
No. 494.

IN the additional chapter written by Dr. Peel for the last edition of Horne's book, *A Popular History of the Free Churches*, attention is directed, to the need for definite objectives, if the life of the Free Churches is not to decay (p. 429). The writer has here put his finger upon a very important but much-neglected consideration. Fighting against oppression develops our human powers and makes for comradeship. Such warfare has lifted many a man above selfishness and made him more nearly a son of God. But when the battle is won, what follows? Too often men fall apart and become absorbed once

more in self-interests and petty things. Milton saw this when he wrote in the *Areopagitica*, "It is not the unfrocking of a priest, the unmitring of a bishop, and the removing him from off the presbyterian shoulders, that will make us a happy nation; "and again, none of the most glorious passages of English prose, he warned his generation that when freedom had been won by arms there was still a warfare to be waged with a more stubborn and intractable despot at home"—namely within a man's own heart. "You, therefore, who wish to remain free, either instantly be wise, or, as soon as possible, cease to be fools; if you think slavery an intolerable evil, learn obedience to reason and the government of yourselves; and finally bid adieu to your dissensions, your jealousies, your superstitions, your outrages, your rapine, and your lusts" (*The Second Defence of the People of England*).

One of the painful features of Nonconformist history is the undeniable fact that when the battle for Freedom has been won, or at least for a time suspended, the warriors have sometimes turned their weapons upon one another. There were dissensions amongst the exiled Separatists in Holland, acts of intolerance among the Puritan settlers in New England; internecine strifes in the ranks of Cromwell's victorious armies, as also in the Scottish history of a later age there were petty-minded divisions among the Glasites, the Old Scots Independents and the followers of the Haldanes.

In the same way it maybe pointed out that when Anglicanism had won, its great victory over the Puritans in the seventeenth century, and had no longer any religious party to fear, it fell into fierce wrangles concerning its own two house's of Convocation.*

So far as Congregational history is concerned the truth

* Hutton's *History of the English Church from the Accession of Charles I to the Death of Anne*, pp. 273-277.

disclosed by these things is the unsatisfactoriness of resting in the merely negative conception of Freedom. Freedom is not an end in itself. When we have won our freedom we reach the beginning of our proper enterprise. If we are free, what is it for? What use shall we make of liberty? It was the failure to consider this question which caused occasional unworthinesses in our early history. And to-day we need to remember that May-meeting panegyrics of principles are no substitutes for the operations of principles.

The first thing for Congregational Churchmen to realise is that having won our freedom to worship God, *we must worship God*. All the glory of our battling is but as the first splendour of the sun before it emerges from the Eastern horizon. We must press on into the presence of the day. This is no light adventure.

'Tis, by comparison, an easy task
Earth to despise; but to converse with heaven—
This is not easy:—to relinquish all
We have, or hope, of happiness and joy,
And stand in freedom loosened from this world,
I deem not arduous; but must needs confess
That 'tis a thing impossible to frame
Conceptions equal to the soul's' desires;
And the most difficult of tasks to *keep*
Heights which the soul is competent to gain.*

But if our adventure is not light, none the less it is imperative. Every religion has both form and spirit. Institutions, rules of ministry, sacred books, sacred places, sacred seasons; rituals and orders of worship are of the form of religion. Communion with God, Faith, Hope, Love—these are of the spirit. Our battles are always

* Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, IV.

concerned with the form, the outwardness of religion. But about the vision of God, which may be possible through these, we never contend. They that have seen God never quarrel about Him. And unless with, or without, the helps and methods of Church-life, we do see Him, there is no use in striving for the liberties of religion.

The task is *not* easy, but, accomplished, how great is the fruition! A seventeenth century sect was known as *The Seekers*—of which name Cromwell remarked that it was good, but that it was better to be a finder. And there is a world of spirit for us to find, to enter into, a world, lifted above all our strife, where we may receive healing for the bitterness and egotism which even the most just warfare is apt to breed in men.

And if it is true that when we meet for worship we draw near to God and to all who are with Him, there will be in our worship a sense of His character and of the glory of that world in which He is the centre. For at such a time it is not we alone who move forward to a great meeting. Our Lord comes to receive us, and having the consciousness of His approach we are changed, we put off the accretions of worldliness which have grown about us and are illumined in the spirit of our mind. Something there is of that feeling which John Woolman often described as the mind “covered with awfulness”; something also of that gladness so daringly portrayed in a beautiful book of the early Church, *The Shepherd of Hermas*: “Therefore, clothe thyself with *gladness** which hath favour with God always, and is acceptable to Him, and rejoice in it. For every man that is glad worketh good, and thinketh good, and despiseth sadness; but the sad man is always committing sin . . . because he grieveth the Holy Spirit which . . . is a glad spirit (M. X. 3).”

* Greek *hilarotes*, from which (through the Latin) our *hilarity*.

Awe and gladness spring naturally in the soul that has the vision of God. His truth convinces our minds. His goodness leads us to repentance. His beauty fills us with hope.

Truth and Goodness and Beauty, indeed, are all summed up in God. Here remains a new emphasis for us modern Congregational Churchmen to affirm. Our denominational forefathers pondered much the truth and the goodness of God, but they failed to recognise that all beauty is from Him. In the age which is upon us, if we should similarly fail, we shall fail also to win the suffrages of our fellows; for the spirit of our time, with all its faults, yet has some real perception of the Glory of God in the things which He has made. Let us not, however, forget that Beauty has many base imitations. Its hall-mark is simplicity. Its vestures have few embroideries. It is a thing of proportions and perspective, of the sweep of stars, of tranquillity, of light, of the softness of evening shadows, of the colours of rose-gardens, of the scent of pines more than of spices, of tastes that are clean rather than cloying, of touches of tenderness as by a skilled hand upon the strings of a violin.

So in our Public Worship—its appointed place, its symbols and its several acts—Beauty is fitting, such Beauty as belonged to Israel's Holy of Holies, with its rich treasures of the Past—the golden censer, the ark overlaid with gold, the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, the table of the covenant, and cherubim of glory.* The fashion and care of our church-buildings should be to us a loving concern, seeing that they are our trysting-places with God. Let them be never so plain they may yet be built in beautiful outline and proportion, kept in cleanness, having some few symbols of holiness, with nothing

* *Hebrews* 9:4-5.

garish about them, nothing that savours of mere entertainment or display.

Our behaviour in drawing near to worship should be both quiet and eager, our prayers neither meditations nor indirect preachments, but thanksgivings, requests for the Kingdom, intercessions for our own nation and for all nations, humble supplications for pardon and for the Divine help in our temptations and sorrows.

Further, the true Christian worship is not an emotional experience, alone. It is impossible to be five minutes with Christ and to forget the needs of mankind. Indeed, as the late Father Tyrrell once reminded us, our love of Christ is only real when it is a love of those He loves.* Here the word of the sermon will come to our aid, as it sets Christ in all His glory in our midst. Thus out of our seasons of awe-touched gladness we shall pass on our way, heightened and deepened in power for service and, like our Priest Himself, touched with the feeling of all human infirmities. It is as Redeemer He comes to us, to make us, in our pleasure, redeemers also.

There are two special forms of Christian Worship to which we attach considerable importance—the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

I. Of Baptism, The command to baptize is given in S. Matthew 28:18–20, And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

We observe Baptism as the initiatory rite of our Church-

* *Lex Credendi*, pp. 23, 30.

connection, because it has been generally so used from Apostolic times and seems to be so intended in the Scripture just quoted. It is moreover a peculiarly significant means of grace, full of all that suggestion of hope and of invigoration which we naturally connect with the clearness of water. If it symbolises to us the life and working of the Holy Spirit in the soul, yet it is not a superfluity to one who, may already have received that Spirit. For when the Spirit had most manifestly fallen upon Cornelius and his friends, they were yet summoned so receive the rite of Baptism. *Then answered Peter, Can any forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.** For while an inner spiritual experience must always be something almost incommunicably our own, our religious life as a whole is an outward as well as an inward thing, and belongs to others as well as to ourselves. We are saved not as isolated units, but to be members of the Body of Christ. Baptism registers that truth. Baptism was practised by the Jews before Christ, and before John the Baptist. As such it signified the surrender of persons, of alien races into the fellowship of the Jewish Religion by the suggestion of sins washed away and a holy life entered upon. In that same light it was regarded by our Lord and His Apostles, and applied by them, to all, of whatever nationality, who would enter the Kingdom of God. Hence it is not enough for us, if we would be regarded as members of His Church, to have our own experience of God. We should humble ourselves, if necessary, to a public act of dedication to holiness, and of fellowship with other believers. So *it becometh us, also, to fulfil all righteousness,*† and so we also may receive a further quickening of the Spirit already ours.

* Acts 10:46-8.

† S. Matthew 3:15.

This, of course, can only apply in its entirety to the case of adults who are converted to Christ's religion from non-Christian families. The practice of Infant Baptism is based upon somewhat different considerations. Infant Baptism, we believe, was administered from the first to the children of Christian parents. It is true, that there is no definite record of this. There are, however, instances related of whole households receiving Baptism at the same time,* and it is reasonable to suppose that children, who had yet to be instructed in the way of Christ, were included amongst them. The Hebrew people were accustomed to regard the family, rather than the individual, as the unit of Society. That, indeed, has generally been the attitude of the Oriental mind. A famous Indian scholar, Sir William Jones commenting upon the Laws of Manu, observes, "A man is perfect when he consists of himself, his wife and his son."† The Jews commonly welcomed to Baptism children of Gentiles with their parents when the latter sought entrance to Judaism. As Professor J. Vernon Bartlet has said, "The idea that a parent should enter a religion or covenant-relation with God as an individual merely, *i.e.*, by himself as distinct from his immediate family, would never occur to the ancients, least of all to a Jew."‡ S. Paul, indeed, taught that the children of even a mixed marriage, *i.e.*, where one parent only was a Christian, were *holy*,§ that is to say, were in a covenant relation with God, which covenant is symbolised by Baptism. While it is true that ultimately everyone of us will be judged on an individual basis, yet in family life, especially in childhood, it is impossible for the individual not to be moulded somewhat by influences

* Acts 16:32-3; I. Corinthians 1:16.

† Quoted by Mozley in his *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages*, p. 37.

‡ *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, II., 378.

§ I. Corinthians 7:14.

common to the family. It is the consecration of these influences, in co-operation with the teaching of the Church, which is effected in Baptism.

It must be admitted that Congregationalists have suffered somewhat in their observance of this rite from the errors of other communions. We must not allow the superstition of any of these to drive us into a merely formal ceremony, or into an act of compliance with an unintelligible convention. If Infant Baptism makes no difference to the infant it would be better not to baptise. But, indeed, we can never sincerely and believingly pray the Redeemer to receive a little one into His keeping and think that He will turn it away. Then and there He does receive it into a closer beatitude. Our belief that this is so arises naturally out of the Principle upon which our Churches are founded, namely, the Presence of Christ with us, when we are met in His Name, and the consequent efficacy of our prayers. The sprinkling with water by the minister, as the representative of Christ, then expresses, as in a picture, a cleansing and refreshing work of grace which at that very time actually begins anew. Blessings may have been given before, but in the sacrament of Baptism, in response to the faith and pure intention of those who engage therein, a new, a richer and a fuller operation of grace is given by Christ Himself. It is true, of course, that we cannot follow the methods of His Spirit in this redeeming work, but we can think of it as Wordsworth did when he broke into the prayer,

Thou, who didst wrap the cloud
Of infancy around us, that Thyself,
Therein, with our simplicity awhile
Might'st hold, on earth, communion undisturbed—★

★ *The Excursion, IV.*

This is not the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration taught in the Prayer Book, from which we emphatically dissent. Regeneration, in a New Testament sense, is too comprehensive a term to describe the grace given to an infant in baptism. We are not born again unless our whole nature is changed, and this can only be when we deliberately accept the saving truths of, Christ's mediatorial work.* These it is the province of the Church to place before the child as its mind acquires ability to understand, and not until then can anything so complete as regeneration happen. But the guarding, indwelling Presence of Christ has a work to do, preparatory to that of the Christian teacher. This last, indeed, the Church by receiving a child to Baptism is pledged to give, as the parents in future time may afford opportunity. In the meanwhile, let us not doubt that the words spoken on the Church's behalf in this covenant-rite do meet with an immediate and continuous Divine Response: *May the influences of the Holy Spirit, symbolised by the application of water, dwell within this child richly.*

Thus, to sum up, Infant Baptism expresses three things:

1. The faith of one, or both parents, in Jesus Christ, the Divine Redeemer, and the parental intention, to bring up the child as a Christian disciple:
2. The gift of the Spirit of Christ to the child as an indwelling Presence, symbolised by the cleansing and quickening, properties of water:
3. The acceptance by the Church of the child as one in due season to be taught the way of salvation.

II. Of the Communion Service. The Principle of the Congregational Churches, namely, the Presence of Christ with any group of believers' meeting in His Name, is most

* Cf. *I. Peter* 1:22-20.

movingly expressed in the Lord's Supper. As Our general worship is a meeting with Him, and even as He comes to the baptised in answer to believing prayer, so when we celebrate the Supper and do as He desired His disciples to do, we may and should feel that He comes amongst us, and this in order to impart to us His very life, more especially in its sacrificial quality for the remission of our sins. With the words of institution (given variously,* and so with no very meticulous care as for formulae that might work charm, or miracle) we associate the discourse in *S. John* 6:25–59 upon the Bread and the Blood of Life—a discourse which shews us that by eating and drinking of Him Jesus meant believing trustfully in Him (6:35).

The expressive acts of, eating and drinking the symbols of His offered life help us to make valid in ourselves all that Jesus was and did throughout His ministry, in His crowning act of obedience to the Father upon the Cross, and all that He is as risen and glorified. In the same way as the Bread and the Wine which we take become a part of our physical life, so by our faith Christ enters into us and reproduces Himself in us. He fulfils the experience of the Servant of the Lord of whom it is written, *He shall see his seed.*† He imparts to us that very spirit which was offered upon Calvary's Cross, making thereby His merits ours and His glory ours. Henceforth, to us there can be no condemnation for past sin, because He is in us, or as *S. Paul* puts it in this connection (*Romans* 8:1), we are in Him, and the oneness of Christ and the Christian is so real that to condemn us would be to condemn Him. To change our figurative language, we are grafted upon Him by our faith, and hence draw our life from all His wonderful Past as well as from the

* *S. Mark* 14:22–25; *S. Matthew* 26:26–29; *S. Luke* 22:17–20; *I. Corinthians* 11:23–26.

† *Isaiah* 53:10.

glory of His present exaltation in. Heaven. We can each say with S. Paul, *I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me (Galatians 2:20).*

In all this it is important to remember that what is required of us is a perception of the Presence of Christ, not in the Bread and the Wine, but as a Person amongst persons; in our very assembly, as we share in the common meal and use the Bread and the Wine for emblems that commemorate His great act of sacrifice for us and for all men. It is a grotesque perversion (due probably to the failure of Western minds to understand Eastern metaphor) when Christ is represented as being on the altar at Communion. *The Lord is the Spirit*, says S. Paul.* He blends Himself with spirits. He can never enter into material things as He can into persons. His coming to us, therefore, in Communion, is not a material coming in consecrated elements, but in those deepening and hallowing suggestions of penitence and faith which, are created by the story of Calvary. The Bread and the Wine are but as counters that represent real money. We employ them to bring home to our childly natures, and to the eyes of our fellows; the partaking acts of our spirit in response to the giving acts of His.

A second and derived truth is that because it is a common meal and we receive it with others, we are brought into a community of life. By receiving Christ together we enter into each, other's life. *We who are many*, says S. Paul, *are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread.*† Further, because we hold very strongly to this conception of the unity of believers in Christ's Church, as

* II. Corinthians 3:17.

† I. Corinthians 10:17.

Congregational Churchmen we have never encouraged great frequency of Communion, as is the way with our Episcopalian brethren. In place of many different hours for the celebration, sometimes even on the same day, in which merely little groups of communicants are likely to assemble, it has been our custom to practice only infrequent celebrations—once or twice a month—in the reasonable hope of bringing together the majority of those who are fellow-members in the same congregation. And it cannot be denied that this custom has been associated with a warmer feeling of mutual regard than generally obtains in Churches that think less of local unity. We believe that in this we are keeping close to that desire of Christ that by love one to another we should reveal to all men what real Christian discipleship means.

A third aspect of the Communion Service is its forward look. We proclaim thereby *the Lord's death till he come*.[★] Doubtless there have been many great consummations of past ages, in which it might, be said that Christ came again, but we look forward to a final advent in which He shall enter into His full inheritance and we with all the redeemed be for ever with our Lord. The Supper points on to that time, for to Jesus as to the Jews the happiness of the final establishment of the Kingdom of God was symbolised by the banquet. Something of a Harvest-Home Supper attaches to our celebrations of the Communion, and by it we renew our childship to the God of Hope. We look stedfastly to that,

One far-off divine event;
To which the whole creation moves.

★ I. *Corinthians* 11:26.

CHAPTER IX

Business Applications of the Principle

Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof
—I. CORINTHIANS 12:27.

It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.—The Apostles and the Elders with the whole Church at Jerusalem (ACTS 15:28).

He which affirmeth speech to be necessary amongst all men throughout the world, doth not thereby import that all men must necessarily speak one kind of language. Even so the necessity of polity and regiment in all Churches may be held, without holding any one certain form to be necessary in them all.—HOOKER'S *Ecclesiastical Polity*, III. 2.

IN our survey of Anglicanism under Elizabeth and Charles II we had reason to see that the most grievous effect of the State-Church principle, then so harshly applied, was in the propagation of hypocrisy. That, indeed, has been the bane of Anglicanism ever since, and is mostly responsible for our evil notoriety in Europe amongst those who scornfully speak of "*l'hypocrisie biblique Britannique*." We do not, of course, charge devout Episcopalians with any conscious falsity. But State-Establishment does no good to religion. It multiplies rules and stipulations, which afford only too much opportunity for the casuist and for the man who uses words with private reservations. Further, the public maintenance of the Christian religion by a people whose national acts are occasionally Pagan, inevitably produces all the show of hypocrisy before the eyes of Mankind. This, perhaps, is the more serious evil of the two.

Undoubtedly there is a nobility in the ideal of an ultimate union of Church and State, but for that union we are as yet very unprepared. To unite Church and State until all citizens are really seeking to follow the Church's teaching is like the act of a cathedral-builder who should insist upon roofing his structure before the walls were strengthened with the buttresses required for carrying the superincumbent weight. Hence it is that our British Christianity, seen from without, not only in Europe but in Asia, continually displays glaring inconsistencies that bring dishonour both to ourselves and to the world-repute of Christ.

There is no safe and honourable principle of Church-life which does not recognise frankly that multitudes of men who are competent enough for citizenship are not competent for Church-membership. Where a State-Church exists, it is not only difficult to resist the encroachments of unbelief and worldliness upon the life of its members, but encouragement is given to the fatal idea that it is not difficult to be a Christian, and that with the great mass of the people all is well, There are no short cuts to the victory of the Kingdom of God in this world; and the idea of a Christian nation has never yet been realised within our borders.

Excepting only so far as, like any other body holding property, it avails itself of the protection of Civil Law, a Congregational Church stands free from all State-support or State-control, which two things must necessarily go together if the State is not to be false to its own first principle. In the present year, 1927, the Church of England, after prolonged discussion and prayer, is to submit to the judgment of Parliament—a body of legislators some of whom may totally disbelieve in prayer—a new order of worship for her children's use. She cannot pray as she desires without the permission of a public body

composed of men of all types of religion and of none! What degradation! What shame to High-Churchmanship! A Congregational Church in its distinctly religious concerns—the ordering of its worship and the election of its officers—utterly refuses to State officials, as such, be they who they may, any voice, or part. Christ's concerns must be determined by Christ's men alone. This position we hold in common with the Free Churches generally.

The more distinctive feature of Congregational polity is the competency of each group of believers to manage its own affairs. It sees no necessity for an elaborate series of denominational Church-courts. In this it closely follows Apostolic precedent. When S. Paul heard of a case of gross misconduct at Corinth he did not hurry to the place to judge the matter himself, nor did he bid the Corinthians call upon the presbyters and deacons of the other Churches in Greece to judge for them, but he bade them settle the case themselves. *Do not ye judge them that are within, whereas them that are without God judgeth? Put away the wicked man from among yourselves.*★

This last reference opens to us the subject of Discipline as one of the functions of the Church-meeting. In the Apostolic Church generally and in our own early Congregational Churches of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, great care of its individual members was exercised by the Church as a whole Discipline was a very real thing. Excommunication was sometimes carried out, suspension of the erring member, until he repented, yet oftener. This care of each by ail is beautifully commended in the *Epistle to the Hebrews: Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God.*† To-day, Discipline is almost extinct. It is felt to be impolite if not impolitic.

★ I. *Corinthians* 5:12-13.

† *Hebrews* 3:12. Cf. also 4:1, 12:12-13, 12:15-16.

Yet there remains an urgent necessity that each community of Christians should be Church-conscious, if the expression may be allowed, and very sensitive to its own honour. Where any obvious inconsistency of life is known to exist, it is the duty of the minister, aided, if needful, by one or more of the members, to visit the offender and seek his reformation. If warning and entreaty and private intercessional prayer fail to change his will, the only course of action, consistent with due regard to the honour of Christ, is the removal of the offender's name from the Church-roll, the matter being reported to the Church in the fewest and most discreet words.

Most Congregational Churches keep a record of the attendance of every member at Communion. By this means any prolonged absence through trouble of any kind, or because of removal from the district, becomes known to the minister, enabling him to offer what help, or counsel, may be within his power. A second use of the record is that should the interest in spiritual things so decline, that a member virtually abandons his first confession of faith, and ceases to attend the sacrament, his name may be removed as that of one no longer competent for Church-life. Thus a rule exists in most churches that six months' absence from Communion, unless explained reasonably to the minister, cancels membership. Although this rule is probably never very strictly, or impatiently, enforced, it may be admitted that there is something rather distressing in thus using the Communion as a test of Christian devotion. At the same time, no other method seems to have been devised which would purge the Church of members, who, while innocent of grave moral error, yet become, as unhappily is too often the case with some in every community of Christians, permanently indifferent to the deepest spiritual interests of the Christian Faith. The retention of such unsatisfactory members, year after

year, often leads to grave trouble; it is matter of common observation that such as these are apt to awaken from their lethargy, when critical issues are involved in the business life of the Church, and to display an unChristlike judgment full of evil consequence to the lives of their fellow members. Moreover a Church which has upon its roll any large percentage of non-communicating members is liable to much self-delusion concerning its own most real resources, and gives a false impression of its strength to its sister-churches.

What may be described as the affairs of a Congregational Church are such as these—the appointment of a minister, the election or dismissal of members, the election of trustees for the property held, the election of elders or of deacons, of Sunday School teachers and other workers, of representatives on outside bodies, the regulation of the necessary finances, the provision and care of the buildings in which the Church meets and works. All these concerns are in the hands of the Church-members alone, those who, as expressed on an earlier page of this book, have covenanted together in a common confession of faith and obedience towards Jesus Christ. If any of the matters just referred to are deputed to Committees, yet ultimately the Church in its business-meeting is responsible for all that is done.

Seatholders who are not members have no share in the final decisions of the Church. It is true that cases sometimes may be met with in which the general congregation is associated with the Church-meeting, in some important decision, as in the call to a minister. Where that is done our polity is ignored, there is an abdication of the rights of the Church involving grave risks for the spiritual welfare of the whole cause. It is quite likely that many regular worshippers who are not members may be better Christians than some who are. Of that, however, only God can judge. Those who are Christ's disciples owe it to Him, as their

Lord and Saviour, to avow their faith and not to despise the fellowship of His confessed followers. If they fail in openness they disqualify themselves from the privilege of His Church. But, broadly speaking, loyal Christians will generally be found ready to accept the status of membership. Any extension of the rights of management from the Church-members to the seatholders is, to the extent it obtains, a degrading of the society concerned from the rank of a New Testament Church based upon spiritual qualifications, to that of a club based upon a monetary subscription. We should do nothing to lessen the prerogative of the Church or to dilute its sense of responsibility.

In the competency of the individual Church there is an equality between all persons. Whatever offices exist are not appropriated to privileged classes, but are open to those who are deemed by their fellows to be most fitted to occupy them. As Congregational Churchmen, ever seeking that enduring principle of regeneration which Lecky declared lay in the character of Christ Himself, we do not care to observe much elaboration of rank. We tolerate the title of "reverend" for our ordained ministers, because it is too entirely a conventional label to be troubled about, but we do not care to follow even our Presbyterian friends when they designate their Moderators as "the very reverend," and whilst we find much that is worthy of respect in the Anglican hierarchy, we turn away from such modes of addressing, the superintendents of Christ's Flock as "my lord" and "your grace," remembering how the Saviour Himself said to His apostles, *Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren.*★

It is sometime asserted, however, against us that we carry this equalitarian sentiment too far, and that we

★ *Matthew 23:8.*

ignore those exhortations in the New Testament which call upon us to obey office-bearers in the Church. That is a matter we should look at with care. It is quite correct that S. Paul somewhat austere insisted upon the subjection of his converts to his guidance. He spoke of them as little children he had begotten in Christ Jesus. What authority he claimed therefore was parental and so of limited range. We must not forget, moreover, that he was a man of peculiarly convinced spirit. More than once he quarrelled with his fellow-apostles. He refused to admit that even those who were reputed to be pillars in the Church, were infallible.* One of them he *resisted to the face, because, he considered, he stood condemned.*† Now fallible apostles can hardly claim infallible obedience. Further, in the vehemence of his beliefs Paul even declared, *Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.*‡ That is a particularly illuminating sentence because it shews that the authority Paul insisted upon was the authority, not of any office he held, but of the message, he delivered. He even conceives that he himself might someday so lapse from Christ as to falsify that message with another Gospel, and he damns himself in advance should that ever happen. Thus it is the authority of Truth we have to obey, rather than the authority of a Church official.

The same sense of authority in the Church comes out in *Hebrews 13. Remember them that had the rule over you, which spoke unto you the word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea, and for ever* (vv, 7 and 8). Behind the rule of their leaders was, the unchanging Christ

* *Galatians 2:6.*

† *Galatians 2:11.*

‡ *Galatians 1:8.*

who wrought the manner of their life. It was this evident Christ in them who called for the obedience of the members. So also in verse 17, *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this were unprofitable for you.* The redemptive quest of ministers and teachers in the Church is of Christ Himself, to Whom they must give account, and only as the Redeemer is seen in them is there any authority to which the obedience of their fellow-members is due. Where that is not made manifest no regularity of Church appointment should coerce us into submission.

Finally, the second and third *Epistles of John* shew that it is possible for one to have a recognised place in the Church and yet be unworthy of the obedience and support of the membership, so that everything ultimately has to be judged by its conformity or otherwise to Christ and His Gospel. To this consideration we must return presently.

Matters of difficulty will often emerge in the management of a Congregational Church. We come together from different classes in society and with different educational attainments, and we are never likely in all practical matters to see eye to eye. Hence sometimes unhappinesses mar our Christian fellowship. It ought to be regarded as involving something like apostasy for any disagreements to dissipate our mutual goodwill. A famous divine, James Guthrie, who died for the Covenanting faith at Edinburgh on 1st June, 1661, used sometimes to say to those who engaged over-zealously in theological controversy, "We have said too much on this matter already: let us leave it till we love one another more."★ That is a

★ *Samuel Rutherford and Some of his Correspondents*—A. Whyte, p. 138.

true and beautiful temper in which to face difficult discussions. Perhaps a shorter method would be to say, We are in the Presence of Christ: let us now ask of Him. Often the only way to get through a troubled Church-meeting is to pray one's way through.

There is a further mode of consideration which a Congregational Church should learn to practise. Just because, as we tried to understand by our parable of the banyan tree (pages 78–9), we draw spiritual life not only through our immediate access to Christ, but also through our association with other churches, we realise that we must sometimes look beyond the individual group of believers to other groups, if we are to have our Lord's I guidance in matters, that appeal differently to different minds. The Presence of Christ is never given for the purpose of breeding in us the vainglory of a coterie, It may sometimes be His Will to speak to our Church through sister Churches, in order that our sense of fellowship may be widened as we learn to look beyond our nearest fellow-believers to a larger and more variously gifted society. The early history of Congregationalism in Scotland, for instance, shews the need for an extensive inter-communion of Churches. Indeed, where we do differ from other Churches, if we must differ, it should be only after careful consideration of their methods and experience. Although S. Paul treated the Church at Corinth as competent for its own concerns, he yet warned its members against rash singularities in their conduct of worship. *What? was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it unto you alone?** God, he bade them remember, *is not a God of confusion, but of peace; as in all the churches of the saints.†* So, if ever there come occasions when a Congregational Church feels compelled

* I. Corinthians 4:36.

† I. Corinthians 4:33.

to break away from some generally accepted rule of faith or life, it should be only after very clear witness of the Spirit in the fellowship of the Church-meeting, and in the perception of the high morality of the way to be followed, and through a fresh disclosure of our Lord's passion for souls. The bearing of this upon questions of ritual in worship is cogent to certain situations within the Congregational denomination to-day.

Out of this sense of the comradeship of the individual Churches have arisen our theological colleges, the various county and national unions with their connected funds and societies. By these means we have been enabled to succour one another and to carry out work that is in the common interests of us all. Further developments along such lines will doubtless arise in the near future.

Here we approach considerations that test the real apostolicity of our type of Church-life. We claim that we Congregationalists are New Testament Churchmen and the proof-texts we quote seem to warrant the claim. Modern discussions as to the organisation of the New Testament Churches have gone largely in favour of our Congregational principle. The labours of scholars like Lightfoot, Hort and Hatch—all of them Anglicans—have established quite satisfactorily our main contentions. The New Testament knows nothing of sacerdotalism or of monarchical episcopacy, and it is entirely opposed in its spirit to the present identification of the Church with the State. But our position is sometimes turned by a contention which is unquestionably true. "There is," says Dr. Hort, "no trace in the New Testament that any ordinances on this subject (*i.e.*, offices in the Church) were prescribed by the Lord, or that any such ordinances were set up as permanently binding by the Twelve or by S. Paul, or by the Ecclesia (*i.e.*, Church) at large. Their faith in the Holy Spirit and His perpetual guidance was

too much of a reality to make that possible.”* And again, “The Apostolic age is full of embodiments of purposes and principles of, the most instructive kind: but the responsibility of choosing the means was left, for ever to the Ecclesia itself, and to each Ecclesia, guided by ancient precedent on the one hand and adaptation to present and future needs on the other. The lesson-book of the Ecclesia and of every Ecclesia is not a law but a history.”†

There can be no doubt that this teaching is in close agreement with the genius of the Reformation, to which our Congregational Churches owe their inception. It is sometimes said that the Reformers substituted the authority of an infallible Bible for an infallible priest, and that all true Protestants are therefore required to obey the letter of the New Testament in regard to Church-order as also in the general conduct of Life. But this is a great mistake. Neither Luther nor Calvin gave the Scriptures any such unqualified authority. They taught that the final authority in the Christian Religion was the inward attestation of the Spirit, the personal conviction born of the immediate contact of the soul with truth.”‡ The Spirit used the Scriptures as a teacher will use a text-book; and it may be remarked that a good teacher never slavishly reproduces his text-book. “Christ is the Master,” said Luther, “the Scriptures are the servant. Here is the true touchstone for testing all the books: we must, see whether they work the works of Christ or not.”§

* *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 230.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 232-3.

‡ Sabatier's *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*. —(English translation, p. 163).

§ Sabatier, *ibid.*, p. 158. See also *Christianity in History*, by J. V. Bartlet and A. J. Carlyle, p. 513.

Thus the centre of authority is the Christian consciousness as it is moulded by the Holy Spirit given in Christ's Name. It was so in the Apostolic Church, the order and offices of which cannot rightly be compared to a framework, for they were not rigid but fluid as the branches and foliage of a tree. If S. Peter speaks of the Church as a temple, it is as a temple, built of *living* stones*—stones that are not static but dynamic, quivering with the energy of life. And life always implies, fluidity towards environment. The life of a Church depends upon its adaptation to Christ Himself, its Source and Founder, to Christ as Redeemer, that is to say to Christ, as He is concerned with this estranged and sin-burdened world. We come back, therefore, to Hort's position and agree that the Apostolic Church is the suitable Church, the Church that is guided by the Spirit of Christ, learning many a lesson from the past, but not tied to the past, watching intently the needs of to-day that through it the Redeemer, may fulfil His gracious purposes towards all mankind. As such no officer—whether bishop, priest, minister, elder, deacon, teacher—is essential to its existence. It is a Divine Society, through its obedience to God possessing the rights of God in all that concerns itself, and it is free to create or refashion, as it deems best, the methods whereby it, seeks to achieve the redemption of human life. To claim, therefore, that our Congregational Churches reproduce the form of the Apostolic Churches is of little avail, unless it appear also that that form meets the necessities of to-day. Far more important than a meticulous care to preserve the New Testament titles, offices or methods is that we should be baptised into the Spirit that gave the New Testament, and let that Spirit with His living waves, mould the forms of our activity as the sweeping

* I. Peter 2:5.

tides of the sea, from time to time, change the fashion of our coasts.

“And, indeed, wherever to-day Christian men are willing to practise such a surrender to the Divine the prospect is full of hope. We sometimes bewail our impotence to advance our cause, when we could easily transform the whole situation by renouncing the tyranny of custom.

Science was Faith once; Faith were Science now,
Would she but lay her bow and arrows by
And arm her with the weapons of the time.
Nothing that keeps thought out is safe from thought.
For there's no virgin-fort but self-respect,
And Truth defensive hath lost hold, on God.*

Signs of encouragement are constantly being made to us from the Unseen to tempt us to throw off our defensive attitude and boldly resume, with new methods, the warfare entrusted to us against the world's, obvious evils—its ignorance and superstition, its intemperance, its selfish class-interests (both bourgeois *and* proletarian), its narrow nationalisms, its pride of pomp and circumstance.

Happily the faults attaching to our life as Congregational Churchmen are not inherent in our system, which is the freest of all ecclesiastical systems, and the most responsive to the new policies of God. Our chiefest fault is infidelity to our basic principle, that we do not believe it enough, nor act as though it were true.

* Lowell's *The Cathedral*.

CHAPTER X

The Principle in relation to Service

Ye are the light of the world.—S. MATTHEW 5:14.

Everyone whose deeds are more than his wisdom, his wisdom endures. And everyone whose wisdom is more than his deeds, his wisdom does not endure.—PIRKE ABOTH 3:12.

Thyself and thy belongings

*Are not thine own so proper; as to waste
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.
Heaven doth with us as we with torches do;
Not light them for themselves: for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd
But to fine issues; nor nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence,
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,
Both thanks and use.*—MEASURE FOR MEASURE, I., 1.

THE careful study of our Lord's public teaching and of His dealings with individuals discloses a particular method. He taught in parables, leaving it to His hearers to interpret them as they would, and He only furnished disciples with explanations when it was evident that their own intelligence had failed them.* For the parable awoke questionings, evoked wonder and imagination. Because it was not readily understood it filled the mind with curiosity. And if men are to be saved they must be made to think, even to think mistakenly, seeing that, no mistake is ever quite complete,

* Some of these explanations may even be the comments of the evangelists.

rather than not to think at all. Jesus would have approved the remark of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, "A neglected intellect is far oftener the cause of mischief to a man, than a perverted or over-valued one."*

So also in dealing with separate persons, if Jesus questioned them, it was in a leading way to draw out their latent powers of mind and conscience; if He replied to questions, it was usually with indirectness, or comprehensiveness, never providing men with explicit information as a boy at school is sometimes furnished with answers to his sums at the end of the arithmetic book.

It is evident that in these things Jesus acted in agreement with the needs of our nature as potentially individual. His aim was to build up integral persons. And in this all our best modern psychology justifies Him. There is sometimes a value in accepting the results of other people's thinking even where we cannot trace their processes, but in the main the unique native endowment of every soul makes it imperative that we should think for ourselves, as ultimately each of us will have to answer for himself.

The same end in view—the upbuilding of persons—was surely present to the mind of Jesus in His teaching about almsgiving and the like. *Sell that ye have, and give alms; make for yourselves purses which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief draweth near, neither moth destroyeth.*† Though He would have been the last to commercialise the spiritual life, He recognised that it was not only legitimate but our duty, as God's servants and not our own masters, to make the best of ourselves, and to follow the ways of service that we might become the better servants. That is the justification of His teaching about rewards. Rewards in religion

* Stanley's *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold*: letter 162.

† *S Luke 12:33*

are the increase of personality, and the final enrichments of the individual are for the glory of God.

In harmony with the methods of the ministry of Jesus, we who are members of Congregational Churches value our autonomy because thereby our individuality is developed. We are continuing the principle He followed when we insist upon the right and duty of every Churchman to share in the management of Church-life. To have a certain order of worship arranged for us by a public authority, in which our representation, if any, is no bigger than that of a single grain of sand in a sandbank, or to have the place of our worship built, or maintained, out of funds we have done nothing to furnish, is not conducive to the growth of personal character in those who accept such provisions. Reality and richness in religion depend upon the conscious effort of individual life.

Here is one of the reasons for which we prosecute independency in Church-life. It ought to bring its healthy reactions in the making of strong men and women.

There is a point, however, where the process of the reaction divides into two streams of influence working into opposite directions. There have been men who have used the Congregational Church-meeting as the place for exercising their own ambitions, like Diotrophes loving to have the pro-eminence,[★] and who go from it to practise for selfish ends the very faculties of management it has quickened. Such men are often characterised in business-life by aptitudes grown in the Church-meeting, or on the Diaconate-initiative, sagacity and disregard of criticism. They make their mark in the world, but it is not the sign of the Cross. And from time to time they come back to the Church-meeting to domineer in its counsels, or to brandish the fist of wealth.

★ III. *Epistle of John*, v. 9.

Such men are the burlesque products of Independency, not its true fruits, because manifestly they have missed the Presence of Christ in His Church.

On the other hand where Christ is truly there discerned, the life of service gives direction to the reactions of our polity; The vigour and practicality which are developed by the autonomy of a group are consecrated for the betterment of mankind. And it is not surprising, therefore, that Congregationalism has produced a remarkable number, of men and women who have nobly served the public interests of their time. Not only can we point to many illustrious names on our records,* but from our Churches have proceeded multitudes of useful workers in public affairs. A modern historian in recording the early beginnings of the American colonies remarks: "It was Congregationalism, far more than any other influence, which determined the political form that the New England colonies were to take, and the spirit which directed and animated that form."† The writer proceeds to say that in the early days of New England not only had every township its Congregational Church, but that such township and Church were practically made up of the same persons, (pp. 56-7). Because of this preponderance of the men of our faith and order in the New England of that day, we are justified in claiming the honour of the following tribute this historian pays to the New England spirit: "Whatever might be the shortcomings of New England, her eyes were never shut to the truth that man does not live by bread alone. Strenuous though her sons might be in the pursuit of wealth, yet material aims were never suffered to stifle the spiritual and intellectual side of life. Her care for education is among the worthiest of her traditions" (p.

* See Dr. Peel's useful little book, *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists, 1530-1924*.

† *Cambridge Modern History, VII.*, p. 11.

58). And again: "It was not only in the narrower and more special sense of the term education that the New England Colonies stood out pre-eminent. They alone had something which might be called a definite and organic school of literature. English thought in the generation which produced Puritanism was intensely articulate. It instinctively embodied in words its experiences and aspirations with due regard to literary form (p. 59)."

Further, what proved to be the formative power in New England—the energy, the intellectual instinct, the moral purpose, the spiritual devotion of Congregational Churchmen, as they planted, and built, and began to form the national consciousness, has been true also of the tendency of the Congregational type of life in our own country. We have played no small part in the work of social and political reform, in municipal councils, in missionary societies, as well as in the industrial life of our nation, in all of which the principle of Christian service may ever find expression.

Now in these and similar ways there is a loud call for our help in the special circumstances of the present time. No. fact is more outstanding in modern life than the moral difficulty attendant upon the combinations in which men act. Trusts and Trades Unions do not make it easy to preserve the cleanness of the individual conscience, There are so many things that we have to do together, that at times it seems difficult for any of us to be honestly Christian until we all are. The need for Christianising Society thus becomes a defensive requirement of the Christian Church. Such an end, however, will never be realised by ignoring the real differences which exist between the ethic of Christ and the ethic of the world. It will be achieved by the. sound and thorough training of young men and women within the Church, in *the whole counsel of God*, as that is revealed in Christ) by our sending

forth such as these to *suffer hardship*, if need be, *as good soldiers of Jesus Christ*, that they may bring the mind of Christ into all forms of human activity, while in the worship of the Church the home-fires of the Spirit are ever kept truly burning, affording comfort and guidance to those whose daily path is so full of difficulty and risk.

In considering more particularly now the Principle of our Churches in relation to service, it should be clearly understood that the Congregational Churchman is not an individualist in any extreme usage of the word. Neither Individualism nor Socialism is more than a half-truth. Strict Individualism is certainly not germane to the Christian Religion, as was made clear in our treatment of the Sacraments in Chapter VIII. We are members of a body. Free-lances and spiritual Don Quixotes are not eligible in our Churches. To-day more than ever our best activities take the form of team-work.

If we may treat *The Acts of the Apostles* as what Dr. Hort called it, "the lesson-book of the Ecclesia," we may find an impressive illustration of Christian service in the story of the missions of the Antioch Church.* The call to venture forth from a home-church into unevangelised regions comes to Paul and Barnabas from the Spirit, but through the Church. It would appear from *Acts* 13:1-2 that there was some special conference, or equivalent of "retreat," being carried on in Antioch. Certain prophets and teachers are named, and then we read, *As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.* They were ministering to the Lord. That is an arrestive phrase. The word so rendered—*leitourgounton*—was used of the ministry of priests in the Temple, and our word *liturgy*

* In this and the two following paragraphs I am borrowing, by permission of the Editor of *The East and the West*, a passage from an article I wrote for that journal in July, 1919.

comes from it. As used here it represents an ardent and Godward concentration of devout thoughts and feelings. The great call thus came to men who were gathered together to offer Christ their love and adoration. It was not first of all addressed to the two men summoned for the new departure. It spoke of them rather than to them: *Separate me Barnabas and Saul*. Probably an actual utterance of this kind burst from the lips of one of the prophets after long rapture upon the heights of Christian aspiration. Then next, as the call is obeyed, *they, i.e., the Church at Antioch, sent them away*; and again, *they, i.e., the apostles, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost went down to Seleucia*. It is significant that the same action is described as the action both of the Church and of the Holy Ghost. It is the coincidence of the human and the Divine which is required for great adventures. Further, on the human side, the point to notice is the communal origin of this mission, the fact that it does not begin in those immediately concerned but arises out of the fulness of the Church's life in a time of rich brooding and of waiting upon God. The call of the Spirit is so spoken as to lay stress upon the loyalty of believers one with another. It discloses the inspiration of the group-mind.

So also at a later stage when S. Paul reaches Troas* the same group-action is illustrated. He has his vision of a man of Macedonia beseeching him, *Come over into Macedonia and help us*. Then we read, *And when he had seen the vision straightway we sought to go forth into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us for to preach the gospel unto them*. There is a lesson in those pronouns—*he, we, us*. To one man at Troas, the keenest mind in the group, the vision came. The rest did not wait for

* Acts 16:8-10.

a similar experience to come to themselves. They went straightway to the docks at Troas and booked a passage for the whole party. They responded to leadership and reaffirmed the oneness of believers. In that little group the foot did not say to the eye, *I have no need of you*. They were loyal to the idea of the team.

We notice, too, that this latter incident is the converse of the former. Whereas at Antioch the call came to the group to send forth the individual, at Troas the call came to the individual for the group to take action. Together these two incidents illustrate perfectly the principle of a Congregational Church at work, the interaction of the individual member and the body to which it belongs. And often still it will be found that a true call of the Spirit is given to one believer through the vision that another receives. As the clear-toned *reveille* of a soldier's camp when dawn is breaking, it peals through the lips of great souls more quickly astir than ourselves to join the hosts of God.

It is a good thing sometimes to plough a lonely furrow, but the work which most redeems the world for God and safeguards the worker from self-engrossment is that which we do shoulder to shoulder in a common effort for the Glory of God.

Such considerations may seem trite and commonplace, but there is room for more recognition of the spirit they express in the ordering of even the best of our Churches. Much valuable opportunity is lost, and much of our strength wasted, by the neglect of mutual loyalty amongst the workers. Too often the Sunday School teacher cares nothing for the work of the Foreign Missions Committee, and the Choir-member nothing for the task of the lay-preachers, while the Young People's Society goes its own dubious way. Once again it needs to be urged that the supreme consideration respecting our church-work is

not so much what we do as the spirit in which we do it, seeing that however valuable our actual accomplishments in the Church may be these have their higher use in fitting us to play our part, in the world, where lies the gigantic task of the Church as a whole—the regeneration of Society, nothing less than this which, if Christ had not laid it upon us to pray for, we should never have dared to ask—that the ‘will of God might be done upon earth *even as it is in heaven!*

EPILOGUE

*There is
One great Society alone on earth:
The noble Living and the noble Dead.*

SO wrote Wordsworth in the eleventh book of *The Prelude*, connecting his friend Coleridge with Timoleon, one of the few Greek of the fourth century, B.C., who made their politics a passion for the public good. There is a world-wide and a time-wide fellowship of heroic souls. It is as the vision of the Catholic Church—the Society of *all who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours.**

This Catholic Church, to which we belong, is partly upon earth, partly in heaven. We do well often to lift up our hearts with the thought of our nearness to those who have entered into rest. It is perhaps yet more important that we should preserve a spiritual freemasonry upon earth, recognising our fellow believers all the world over, by whatever denomination they may be called. And this is possible. Some fellowship in holy things is at times established unofficially between those as far apart outwardly as Roman and Congregational churchmen. Indeed the more deeply we abide in Christ the more sure we are to meet the sincere of communions that differ widely from our own.

Yet as we began this little book with a warning against denominational indifferentism, so we close by affirming that nothing is to be gained for religion by disloyalty to that Church-life in which we ourselves have been taught. the Word of Christ. Faithfulness to conscience calls upon us to remain Nonconformist, until conformity squares

* I. Corinthians 1:2.

with our honest understanding of the Way of Christ. And in this we are encouraged by some historic testimony. Here in England the stedfast witness of a good many generations of Congregational Churchmen has not been without effect upon the Church from which they had dissented. Not a few of the evils because of which our fathers came out from the Church of England have been, or are being, removed. That Church has made some notable progress towards spiritual autonomy; it is still moving towards our central position; one day it will arrive.

In the meantime let us remember that however desirable corporate Reunion may be, we are to look for it, not through the surrender of any principle vital to ourselves, but through a keener and more logical practice of what we know to be true. Our Lord did not pray that His followers might be mutilated into one, but *perfected into one*.★

Being broad Churchmen we Congregationalists do not incessantly lament the divisions of Christendom as necessarily “unhappy.” It is true at times we are reproached by some of our Anglican friends with being in a state of schism, which they tell us is a state of sin, though they are quick to add, charitably enough, that there are sporadic graces in us indicative of occasional visits of the Holy Ghost. Rather than broaden their doctrine of the ministry they are willing to ascribe eccentricity to God, forgetful that *God is not a God of confusion, but of peace*.† Our reply is that undoubtedly we are in a state of schism and that schism is sinful, but that the sin is not ours. The last word upon the ethics of secession was said long ago by Archbishop Laud, when rebutting the charge of the

★ *S. John* 17:23.

† *I. Corinthians* 14:33.

Jesuit Fisher that Anglicans were schismatics from the Church of Rome:—"The cause of the separation is yours, for you thrust us from you, because we called for truth and redress of abuses; for a schism must needs be theirs whose the cause of it is . . . and he makes the separation who gives the first just cause of it, not he that makes an actual separation upon a just cause preceding."* So much for the sin of schism. It has, moreover, like other human troubles, an overruled aspect. We believe that in the Providence of the Father, partly through our very vagaries and explorations, partly through our being thrown back upon the immense possibilities of each individual life, separations have developed aspects of that Fulness of Truth which sums up all that is best in the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Methodist and the Congregational systems. Doubtless the reunited Church of the future, when it comes, will be more complex than our own simple and loved Congregational order, but it will include that priest-free, State-free, brotherly life we know already, when, meeting in the Name of Christ, we are able to say in Whitfield's beautiful words that we hear among us "our Redeemer's stately steps," and are conscious that upon us too, in all our weakness and need, comes the Breath of the Risen Lord and His reviving word, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*. This it will include not as a glass of water may include a grain of sand, a heterogeneous element. within 'an artificial and formal unity, but as such a glass may contain some tinctured essence that colours and modifies the whole.

* Neal: *Vól.* II., p. 45.

PRINCIPLES OF A CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

PREPARED BY THE LITERATURE COMMITTEE OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES

1. The Church of Christ in any place is a company of Christians, among whom Christ manifests His presence in their common worship, fellowship and service.
2. A Christian is one who through faith and service is united in spirit to Christ. Apart from this living union, no outward forms or rites can make us members of the Body of Christ.
3. Our Lord unites His people in this visible fellowship for the worship of God, for the ministry of His Word and Sacraments, and for the establishment of His Kingdom throughout the world.
4. Although the Church Universal is organized in various forms, speaks different tongues, and is dispersed throughout the world, yet it is one body in Christ.
5. A Congregational Church acknowledges no authority but that of Christ, its Head. The presence of Christ and our obedience to Him as Redeemer and Lord give to the Church the responsibility of liberty in thought, worship and government. Each Church must, therefore, try to interpret and carry out His Will, relying upon the guidance of His Spirit, remembering its fellowship with Christians in all places, and recognizing the value and the duty of close co-operation with them in the service of the Kingdom of God.
6. A Christian minister is one who is called of God and set apart by the Church to preach the Gospel, to build up the Church, and to care for Christ's people.
7. A Congregational Church observes two Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are visible signs of our membership in the Church.

Baptism is the recognized sign of admission into the Church of Christ. It is our usual custom to baptize children in infancy because they belong to the Church's family and are to be trained to enter later into its full membership.

In the Lord's Supper the assembled Church, taking bread and wine in remembrance of Christ's suffering and death for mankind, renews its communion with its Redeemer. Those who partake in faith, thankfully realizing their union with each other and with their present living Lord, receive anew the gift of His Spirit, and dedicate themselves to the service of the world for His sake.

Recommended for Further Reading

- BROWN, JOHN, DR.—THE PILGRIM FATHERS OF NEW ENGLAND.**
Religious Tract Society. 3s. 6d. net.
- CAMBRIDGE MODERN HISTORY—vol. iii, chs. 10 & 22.**
Cambridge University Press. 24s.
- CAMBRIDGE MODERN HISTORY—vol. iv, chs. 8–12, 15, 17.**
Cambridge University Press. 24s.
- CARLYLE—OLIVER CROMWELL'S LETTERS AND SPEECHES.**
Chapman & Hall. 4 vols. 5s. net each.
- CHRONICLES OF THE PILGRIM FATHERS.**
Everyman's Library. Dent & Sons. No. 480, 2s.
- †**CLARK, HENRY W., DR.—HISTORY OF ENGLISH NONCONFORMITY.**
†**DALE, DR.—HISTORY OF ENGLISH CONGREGATIONALISM.**
- CONGREGATIONAL WORTHIES: JOHN MILTON, SIR HENRY VANE
THE YOUNGER, ROBERT BROWNE, ROBERT BLAKE, JOHN HOWE,
JOHN OWEN, JOHN HOWARD, HUGH PETERS, JOHN GOODWIN.**
Independent Press. Each 6d. paper, 10d. cloth.
- DALE, DR.—MANUAL OF CONGREGATIONAL PRINCIPLES.**
Independent Press. Paper, 2s. net; cloth, 3s. net.
- †**DEXTER—CONGREGATIONALISM OF THE LAST 300 YEARS AS SEEN
IN ITS LITERATURE.**
- GARDINER, S. R.—HISTORY OF THE COMMONWEALTH AND PRO-
TECTORATE.** Longmans. Vols. 1, 2 and 4 6s. each. (vol. 3 now O.P.)
- GREEN, J. R.—SHORT HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE.** Chs. 7–8.
Dent & Co. vols. 1 and 2. Everyman's Library. 2s. net, per vol.
- HEARNSHAW, DR.—SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS OF THE 16th and
17th CENTURIES.** Harrap & Co. 7s. 6d. net.
- HORNE, C. S.—A POPULAR HISTORY OF THE FREE CHURCHES.**
The Independent Press. 5s. net.
- HORTON, DR.—JOHN HOWE.** Methuen & Co. 3s. net.
- HUTCHINSON—MEMOIRS OF COLONEL HUTCHINSON.**
Bohn's Library. Bell. 6s. net.
- JAMES, T. T.—THE WORK AND ADMINISTRATION OF A CONGREGA-
TIONAL CHURCH.** Independent Press. 3s. 6d. net.
- †**KNOX, JOHN—HISTORY OF THE REFORMATION OF RELIGION IN
SCOTLAND.** Edited by Lennox.
- MACEWEN, DR. A.—A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND.** vol. ii.
Hodder & Stoughton. 7s. 6d. net.
- MACKENNAL, DR.—THE STORY OF THE ENGLISH SEPARATISTS.**
The Independent Press. 1s. net.
- †**M A S S O N ' S , D R . J O H N — L I F E O F M I L T O N .
MORLEY, JOHN—OLIVER CROMWELL.** Macmillan & Co. 7s. 6d. net.
- PEEL, DR.—THE SECOND PARTE OF A REGISTER.**
Cambridge University Press. 2 vols. 30s. net.
- PEEL, DR.—THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.**
Cambridge University Press. 5s. 6d.
- PEEL, DR.—The BROWNISTS IN NORWICH AND NORFOLK ABOUT 1580.**
Cambridge University Press. 7s.
- PEEL, DR.—A HUNDRED EMINENT CONGREGATIONALISTS.**
Independent Press. 2s. 6d. net.
- PIERCE, WM.—JOHN PENNY.** Supplied by Independent Press. 21s. net.
- PRICE, E. J.—HANDBOOK OF CONGREGATIONALISM.** Independent Press. Paper, 1s.,
and cloth, 1s. 6d. net.
- POWICKE, DR.—A LIFE OF THE REV RICHARD BAXTER.**
Jonathan Cape. 15s.
- POWICKE, DR.—THE REV. RICHARD BAXTER UNDER THE CROSS.**
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- POWICKE, DR.—THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS.** Dent & Sons. 7s. 6d.
- †**ROSS, DR. JAS.—A HISTORY OF CONGREGATIONAL INDEPENDENCY
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- SELBIE, DR.—CONGREGATIONALISM.** Methuen & Co. 5s. net.
- †**SHAW, W. A.—HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH DURING THE
CIVIL WARS AND UNDER THE COMMONWEALTH.**
- †**SKEATS & MIALl—HISTORY OF THE FREE CHURCHES OF ENGLAND.**
- †**STOUGHTON, DR.—ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF ENGLAND.**

† These books are out of print, but can be consulted in any good reference library.