

as well say that he has not time to study mathematics. The philologist might just as well say that he has not time to study the facts of language, and therefore must content himself with the philosophy of language. The facts of history are permanent; opinions founded on them are variable and often transient. With a knowledge of facts, one may constantly improve his theory. A theory without facts can neither be safely used nor mended. There should, at least, be one period of history, longer or shorter, general or special, in which the student is so far at home that he can see with his own eyes and think his own thoughts. That spot will be a bright light to him, and will aid him essentially in understanding other things.

ARTICLE V.

THE SCRIPTURAL PHILOSOPHY OF CONGREGATIONALISM AND OF COUNCILS.

[This Article, written by Rev. Dr. EDWARD BEECHER, is the Twelfth in the Series of Articles representing the views of different ecclesiastical denominations.]

WHEN any system is itself a part of a higher and more comprehensive system, the development of its philosophy is equivalent to an exposition of its end, and of the relations of that end to the higher system of which it is a part.

The higher system of which Congregationalism is a part, is known in the sacred scriptures as *the Kingdom of God*. To this higher and more comprehensive system Congregationalism sustains vital relations. It is our present purpose to set forth its end, and the relations of that end to the higher system of which it is a part. As this exposition cannot be made by the light of reason alone, but depends on the testimony of God in the sacred scriptures, it may properly be called the scriptural philosophy of Congregationalism.

The Kingdom of God.

In studying the life, aims, and actions of Christ, we are impressed with three great facts:

1. There were on record certain prominent and sublime predictions as to the kingdom of God, which were to be fulfilled by him.

2. He accepted them as of divine origin, and undertook the work of their fulfilment, by ordaining a system of means to that end.

3. He regarded the universal extension and the absolute supremacy of that kingdom as lying in the distant future.

Let us consider these facts a little more in detail.

The predictions of a future kingdom of God on earth in the Old Testament are many. Of these, however, none are more explicit and sublime, and none more specially regarded by Christ, than those contained in the Book of Daniel. In particular, in the seventh chapter of that book, the prophet first exhibits, as presented to him in vision, a series of worldly kingdoms, represented by a corresponding series of bestial forms, arising from the great sea, amid the strife of the four winds of heaven.

At the close of the series, the Messiah comes, in fiery flames, to judge and to destroy these bestial kingdoms, and to establish, instead of them, *the kingdom of God*. This glorious consummation is described in language of unequalled sublimity, and concludes with these words: "There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

This, at the close of the chapter, is explained by the angel-interpreter as equivalent to a reign of God through his regenerated people; for, concerning the same kingdom that was given to the Messiah, it is said, "the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of

the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."

For centuries before the Messiah came these divine oracles had cast their cheering light amidst the gloom of despotic and idolatrous powers. At last he came, and, before the nation and the world, recognized the truth of these great predictions, and declared that the glorious *kingdom of God*, so long foretold, so long expected, was at hand. He affirmed, also, that he came to fulfil all that had been predicted concerning it in the oracles of God. That he did fulfil the divine oracles, that he did develop and establish the kingdom of God, in its essential elements and principles, is no less true. That he did so, is implied in his fidelity to God, and is repeatedly declared in the divine word.

But he did not effect that universality and supremacy of this kingdom which had been foretold. All people, nations, and languages did not serve him. The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, were not given to the people of the saints of the Most High. On the other hand, Christ regarded the kingdom of God, *in its full development*, as still in the future, and to be attained only by ages of conflict. The judgment and burning of the bestial kingdoms were not effected in his day. On the other hand, even after his resurrection and ascension on high, he foretold by his servant John, particularly in chapters xii. — xix. of the Apocalypse, a protracted reign of that great bestial power which had absorbed all its predecessors, and the corruption of the nations by a false church, sustained by the beast; and after this a judgment, equivalent to that foretold by Daniel; and after this the reign of the saints with Christ, or the fully developed kingdom of God. This is yet in the future. It appears, then, that the fully-developed and all-embracing kingdom of God is to be an ultimate result of a system of principles and measures introduced by Christ in his day. In order, then, fully to understand this system of principles and measures, we need to consider what is involved in the ultimate result, and their relations to it.

The Kingdom of God fully developed and Universal.

Christ's declaration that his kingdom is not of this world, that is, is not a secular, civil state, but a spiritual kingdom, has led many to regard civil government, commerce, the arts and sciences, education, and the schools as in such a sense *secular* as to form no part of the kingdom of God. This, according to them, is purely spiritual, and is confined to things ecclesiastical. From this flows an assumption, not always stated, but in fact made a basis of feeling and action, that these secular things are, in some sense, of necessity, unsanctified and worldly, and that, as such, God has no deep interest in them, and does not design to bring them all under his own influence and control.

Now, though it is true that these great departments of human life have been for ages unsanctified and unsubsidiary to the laws of God and to the gospel, and though it is true that in this state of things God reigns, in cordial sympathy, only in and through that ministry of regenerated men who form the church, while the world lies in wickedness; yet the very end for which the church was ordained, was to bring to pass ultimately another result, and that is to bring civil government, the state, commerce, political economy, the arts and sciences, and the schools, under the influence of God, so as to pervade them with the influence of his law and the gospel, and thus to make them a harmonious and consistent part of his kingdom. Such a result can only be effected by the universal indwelling of God in the individuals of whom human society is composed, inclining and enabling them to act on his principles and for his glory in all that they do, in all departments of life; so that, according to an ancient prophecy, *holiness to the Lord* shall be inscribed on all things, even such as have been regarded as earthly and secular.

Viewing the church in this light, even when vastly in the minority, it contains in itself the elements and principles of the kingdom of God in its full and universal development. For this reason our Saviour compares it to leaven, designed to leaven the whole lump.

The fully-developed and all-comprehending kingdom of God on earth is, then, a conception as simple as it is great and glorious. It is the reign of God in all departments of human society, through regenerated and holy men. It involves that constant action of God, in and through men, for which an infinite and omniscient Spirit alone is competent. This action Christ illustrates by the analogy of the constant action of the vine on its branches, which is essential to their vitality and fruitfulness. No power of angels or of men can take the place of this action of God, in and through the individual elements of the social system. No form of government or mode of organization can be a substitute for it. From it results a kingdom which no one can administer but God himself. In it he can have no vicar. He is its constant life, its controlling power. And he controls it, not by force, but by truth, and by holy emotions in view of truth. Hence Christ declared his kingdom to be, in its highest and noblest idea, a kingdom of truth, and thus distinguished it from secular kingdoms of force, with which Pilate was in danger of confounding it (John xviii. 36, 37).

This kingdom of God does not absorb into itself, or abolish, the civil governments of earth; but it sends a divine influence through them, that directs, perfects, regulates, and controls them. It does not involve one outward, universal, civil government, administered by Christ and the saints; but it implies that all men have become saints, and administer the various civil governments of earth, and transact its business under the inspiring and illuminating influence of God.

Nor does it imply an outward ecclesiastical organization, with human officers and administrators. It implies solely a Christian organization of society, in all nations and in all its parts, effected, sustained, and animated by God, acting in regenerated men.

Of this perfected society local churches will still be a part. But they alone will not fill out the full idea of the predicted kingdom of God; for that will include the whole

of human life in all departments of action. This is what we mean when we say that Congregationalism is a part of the higher system known in the scriptures by the name of the kingdom of God.

To be in such a kingdom is always a reality, and never a form. No man, as our Saviour declares, enters it except by regeneration. Of this, the reason is plain: every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him; while he who loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love. The pure in heart see God, and the poor in spirit possess his kingdom. These are the elements which, fully developed and made universal, shall establish on earth the kingdom of God.

Means of attaining it introduced by Christ.

If the kingdom of God, as it has been set forth, was before the mind of Christ as a result to be attained, it follows of necessity, that he ordained a system of means for the attainment of this end. This invests with peculiar interest the inquiry what that system was, and what are its relations and adaptations.

We should, from the very nature of the case, be led to suppose that, if the kingdom of God, at which he was aiming, had any striking characteristic, he would adapt his means wisely to the attainment of that characteristic. Such a characteristic we have seen there was. The universal kingdom of God is a kingdom in which none but God, as an omnipresent, omniscient, all-illuminating, all-vitalizing Spirit can be, or act as king. No angel or man, and no organization of angels or of men, can take his place. As well might we attempt to organize the solar system around a lamp, instead of the sun. That this was the characteristic of the kingdom of God, none better knew than our Saviour. We should not, then, expect from him any system tending to supersede God in his kingdom as its only possible bond of unity and vital power. On the other hand,

we should expect to find his whole system pervaded by the recognition of the great truth, God, and God only, is able to be the omnipresent and omni-agent king of the whole earth, and the all-pervading and sympathetic bond of union to all men, animating, perfecting, and controlling the social system in all its parts. We should expect from him a distinct statement of this great truth, with a design to exclude great human centralizations, whether monarchical or aristocratic, from his system, lest they should intrude themselves into the place of God, and turn men away from their only true life and uniting and controlling power.

As we should expect, so we find. This is the import of the words: "One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. Call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. xxiii. 8-11). Of a similar import is his reply to a request for the highest seats of power in his kingdom. After referring to the exercise of centralized power in the kingdoms of the Gentiles, he says: "it shall not be so among you; whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. xx. 20-28). So carefully did he guard the peculiar prerogatives of God in his kingdom, and rebuke all attempts of unholy human ambition to intrude into, and vainly to try to fill, his place.

Nor did he attempt to fill the place of God by extended hierarchal organizations of particular churches into one great body, with legislative and judicial power. If this mode of organization had been regarded by our Saviour as a desirable and legitimate means of introducing and establishing the kingdom of God, there was no reason why it should not have been so declared at the outset. The kingdoms of earth were extended organizations. Such an organization the Jews anticipated. All were ready to adopt it.

If it was not introduced by Christ, if something entirely unlike it was introduced in its stead, there must have been a real and a deep reason for such a decision, and that reason could have been nothing but this, that the system excluded was not adapted to introduce the kingdom of God, and that the system introduced was thus adapted.

The historical fact is plain and undeniable. A hierarchy was not introduced by Christ and his apostles. The system actually established by them was a system of free, independent, self-governed, local churches. This is conceded by eminent church historians of all denominations. The historical facts alleged by Congregationalists, and conceded by the most eminent historians, are :

1. The establishment of local churches, and not of an extended organized church, either for the world, or for nations or provinces.

2. These churches were composed of professed believers in Christ, or regenerated persons.

3. Their object was the cultivation of holiness, and its extension among men.

4. These churches were independent of each other, in the sense that each had full power to conduct its own worship, to admit its own members, to exercise its own discipline, to choose and ordain its own officers, to make its own regulations, and manage its own affairs, without subjection to any organization or head.

5. Each of these churches was accustomed to come together, for worship and for the transaction of business, into one place. Nor is any example given of a church of which this was not true.

6. The permanent officers of the churches were of two kinds, pastors and deacons. The pastors were also called elders, overseers, and teachers. The apostles had no successors. They are still in the church, and rule it by their inspired writings.

7. The exercise of discipline with final power is, by positive law, enjoined on the local church, and its exercise is illustrated by the action of particular church

8. The churches admitted the divine origin and relations of each other, and the fellowship growing out of it, and in cases of doubt consulted each other.

Moreover, this system grew out of the true and divine idea of the kingdom of God which it was designed to introduce and establish. It was a system adapted to develop and cultivate personal holiness, and thus to unite the individual elements of all social systems to God; and it left room for God to be the universal uniting, organizing, and ruling power of human society. Moreover, it created an obvious necessity for him to act as such, by introducing no great outward organization, or system of forms, which could be idolized or worshipped in his place. It thus created a felt necessity of a present God, and of universal personal holiness, with which he can enter into vital and sympathetic communion, and through which he can act in all the relations of life, "above all, and through all, and in all" (Eph. iv. 6).

The Fundamental Warrant and Reason of Congregationalism.

If the great end of Christ, if that upon which the introduction and establishment of the kingdom of God depends, is the development and culture of personal holiness, and the extension of divine influence through it, in all the relations and offices of the social system, then the fundamental reason of his institution of the Congregational system as a means to that end, must have been its superior fitness to promote it. Of this we might, through faith, be sure, from the very nature of God. For the attainment of so great an end as his kingdom, he would not introduce any but the wisest and best adapted means.

But we are not confined to faith. We can see and state the reasons of this superiority of adaptation. It is best adapted to keep Christians in direct and vital contact with the Bible, and thus with God, through it.

The nature of holiness is such that all that belongs to its development and culture, is more fully and more perfectly

revealed in the words of God, than anywhere else. This is, and ever must be, the great fountain-head of holiness. We cannot abide in Christ, except as his words abide in us. There is a fulness, a many-sidedness, a vitality, a perfection, a power, in the word of God, which cannot be found, and never will be found, in any human compositions. The Bible does not tend to one-sided development; it nourishes the whole man. It does not produce dry, intense, heartless speculation, but it suffuses the whole intellect with love.

Now it is evident that the Bible, as the word of God, designed to produce holiness, can be fully and perfectly developed in a local church. There is no need of an extended organic system in order to effect this. The laws of love, the nature of sin, human depravity, the atonement, regeneration, repentance, and faith, and the fruits of a holy life, viewed in a practical light, are plain. And in the culture of holiness, a covenant with God and one another, to lead a holy life, Christian fellowship, mutual watchfulness, the study of the Bible, and Christian activity, are all provided for, in the fullest manner, in the local church. For the culture of holiness, no system can be more simple, perfect, and powerful than this.

But there are, from the nature of the case, necessary limits to a practical power to act in covenant relations, to exercise watchfulness, and to meet for worship; and it is worse than useless to try to transcend them. Hundreds of thousands, or millions, cannot meet together in worship, or act together in covenant care and fellowship.

Hence the real and practical work of cultivating holiness must be effected by limited local organizations, for the social study of the Bible, for preaching and worship, for covenant co-operation and watchfulness. For these ends, free local churches are perfectly competent, and they tend to concentrate all the energies of the mind on these ends. The result is a practical conviction, which the Bible ever tends to produce, that God only is great, God only is to be adored. He is the King of all worlds, he fills all things with his glory:

he, and he alone, can fill, animate, and control all things by his vital power. There is thus produced a constant desire for the vision of his glory, and a deprecation and holy abhorrence of all human attempts to eclipse him and to take his place.

On the other hand, the introduction of higher organizations, judicial, legislative, executive, at once introduces human systems of order, articles of belief and human books as authoritative standards, between the churches and the Bible. Under the system ordained by Christ and his apostles, the word of God is always, and alone, *the book*. *The Bible*, as the title of the sacred writings, is the natural result of that system. On the other hand, extended organizations always produce some guide-book of human composition, which, by a natural course of things, usurps the title of the word of God, and is called *the book*.

Thus is created a field of interest and action, in legislation, interpretation, and judgment, adapted to divert the interest of the mind from the practical and experimental study of the Bible in the present local sphere which results from Congregationalism.

Thus, too, the way is opened for making, fearing, and worshipping a great idol, called *the church*, in the place of God. Thus, too, are introduced temptations, addressed to the love of wealth, power, honors, and place.

Nor is this all. An essential element of the cultivation of holiness, is the power of discipline. This is given by Christ to the local church (Matt. xviii. 15-18); and in the local church, as ordained by him, there is no standard but the Bible. All hierarchal organizations, from the necessity of the case, and as a matter of fact, take away this power from the local church. Thus is Christ's great law of discipline suspended, which contemplates the local church only, and recognizes no higher power.

These tendencies of hierarchies are not merely speculative. They have revealed themselves in facts, and have been fearfully effectual in every age. And, at this time,

there is no hierarchal organization on earth, in which human legislation and creeds do not come between the local churches and the Bible, or in which the law of Christ can be carried out in the administration of discipline. Under any hierarchy the local church has not the ultimate power of discipline, and cannot have it; for no local decision can be made that is not liable to reversal by superior powers.

We see, then, as we might suppose, that as free local churches were ordained by Christ, so they are the wisest and most effectual means of gaining his great end; and that their establishment was not owing to any peculiar and transitory circumstances of the age. In proportion as Christ's ideal of holiness, and of the kingdom of God through it, is understood; in proportion as the culture of true scriptural holiness becomes a matter of intense desire,—will the superior adaptation of free local churches to these great ends be the more clearly seen.

And it is an undeniable fact in church history, that in proportion as hierarchies subverted the system of free local churches, originally ordained by Christ, in the same proportion the study of the Bible receded, and the study of the traditions of men took its place. This process went on until the Old and New Testaments, the two great witnesses of God among men, were clothed in sackcloth, and testified for ages in vain. We use these words, not as the interpretation of a prophecy, but as the best description of a great and undeniable historical fact.

In antithesis to this, is the great and equally prominent fact, that the system which has been most efficient in producing popular education and intelligence, freedom, individual energy and enterprize, and a development of the claims of God to pervade and control the whole social fabric, is the system of free churches, organized on the assumption of the supremacy of the Bible as the inspired and only infallible rule of faith and practice.

The Great Temptation and Delusion.

The great impulse towards higher organizations has ever been found in aspirations after *the unity of the church*, falsely understood. That God desires and aims at a unity of the church, is clearly asserted in his word. But it is a matter of great moment to know what this unity is, and what it involves. The Congregational view is, that it is not an external and formal unity, produced by organization, standards, rulers, and forms, but a real union, made and sustained by God. It is a union which is not possible without holiness, and which is real and powerful in proportion to the reality and power of holiness. Hence as free local churches are the wisest and most effectual means of producing this holiness, they tend most directly to this unity. In proportion as men become holy, God and his system become real to the mind, and are truly seen, and they have real and vital communion with him, and through him with one another. Thus are men united by God in the highest forms of intellectual, moral, and sympathetic unity.

This unity is commensurate with the globe. No lines of nations or continents bound it. It is a unity produced by that God who can at all times fill all things. It is a unity which no created being, or system of beings, can produce. It is the glorious result of the highest and most peculiar prerogatives of God. At this unity intelligent Congregationalism aims. It is content with nothing short of it, or below it.

On the other hand, Congregationalism teaches that any unity based on legislative and judicial organizations above local churches is not the unity desired by God; but results either in one world-embracing hierarchy, or else in divided and manifold hierarchies.

For if legislative and judicial organization, above local churches, is essential to preserve the unity of the church, then it ought to be commensurate with the unity to be preserved. But as God and his church are world-pervading, so must be the unity of his church. Here, then, we land in

a world-embracing organized hierarchy. This is the aim and profession of the Roman church; and it is a logical result of the premises. Rome at least is consistent with this principle.

If we still introduce higher organizations above the local church, and yet fall below a universal hierarchy, then we have organizations of local churches in particular states and nations, called churches of such states or nations. But what is to unite them? They must either remain divided, or at last rely on intellectual, moral, and sympathetic unity in God, on which Congregationalism relies from the beginning.

But if in addition to this, in any state or nation, as in ours, there are many organizations above local churches, each called a church, then the unity of each is not the unity of Christ's whole church, even in that nation. How, then, are these great churches to be united? To make any union, they must again resort to intellectual and moral unity, through God, even as Congregationalism does from the beginning.

But such large organized hierarchies, called churches, instead of promoting the union desired by God, tend rather to produce division, in its worst and widest forms. For when divided opinions as to doctrine or order or the choice of rulers occur, the interests, powers, and honors involved are vast, and tend to blind and deceive the conscience, and result in immedicable schisms. And when, in such vast organizations, schisms occur, they run through many local churches. Moreover, in large bodies, extending over a wide extent of territory, and developing love of power and honor, and by them intensifying conscientious convictions, and party beliefs and interests, the causes of division and disruption are not only multiplied, but are so intensified as to become irresistible.

Hence the history of hierarchies is a history of divisions, wide-spread and intense. The history of the Roman hierarchy is a history of schisms. The attempt to unite the

church under a world-embracing hierarchy, led to the great and immedicable schism between the Greek and the Latin hierarchies. The schisms of the Greek church still pervade the oriental world. Who does not recall the great schisms of the papal hierarchy, when European Christendom has been divided between two or more contending and excommunicating popes? Who cannot recall the numerous schisms of Presbyterianism, both in Scotland and in this country? How many Presbyterian bodies there are, each of which calls itself the church, and talks of the unity of the church. What hierarchal body is exempt from such tendencies, and similar facts in its history? Such centralized judicial and legislative bodies, therefore, neither unite the church as a whole, nor do they unite even those portions of the church which they embrace. On the other hand, they involve in themselves the elements of division, and that of the worst and most wide-spread kind.

Congregationalism alone, by rejecting the hierarchal principle entirely, and aiming at an intellectual, moral, and sympathetic unity, through God, aims at a unity commensurate with the kingdom of God. This is a universal, a world-wide unity. It aims not at the unity of one denomination, not at the unity of all the churches of the nation, but at the unity of all who are redeemed by Christ in all nations. If this is to be effected by the hierarchal principle at all, it demands a universal hierarchy. Congregationalism renounces the hierarchal principle entirely, and aims at universal, intellectual, moral and sympathetic unity through God. Even hierarchal systems lower than the papacy are obliged to resort to the same principle, or else renounce other Christian bodies as no part of the church or of the kingdom of God.

It is the grand peculiarity of Congregationalism that it resorts to this idea of unity from the beginning, from the free local church. By this they aim to cultivate holiness, and by the power of God acting through this, to unite all the Christians of this earth as one.

The Power of the Congregational Principle.

It cannot be denied that the most powerful influence, intellectual and moral, that can act on the human mind, is communion with God and subjection to his influence through his word. Nothing so ennobles and so healthfully develops the intellectual powers. Nothing gives to the mind such true enlargement and comprehensiveness of vision. Nothing so quickens and perfects the moral sense. Nothing gives such courage and energy to adhere to the right. Nothing so searches the heart, reveals sin and error, and delivers from delusion. Nothing so surely guides in the study of all truth, theoretical and practical. But the grand, the vital idea of Congregationalism, is to bring all men, as individuals, into habitual communion with God, and to keep them under his influence, through his word. For this very reason it avoids ecclesiastical monarchies, and all large centralized organizations. For this reason it denies the existence of two orders of Christians, one of which, as a clerical caste, has dominion over spiritual things, and is the essential medium of intercourse with God to the other class. It teaches that all Christians are kings and priests to God; that all have, through Christ, direct personal access to the Father; that all can enter the holy of holies. This was the original apostolic doctrine and practice. A distrust of the reality of this divine power of God over all men as individuals, and a fear to rely on it, lead to hierarchies. A caste of spiritual rulers, to act as mediators between God and common men, and to centralize them in religious monarchies or aristocracies, is felt to be needed to take care of the church. Confidence is reposed in the great whole, so organized. In one sense, this view produces a strong government. It is strong to prevent free, general, and popular intellectual growth and development. It is strong to enslave the human mind to the traditions of men. But to produce universal popular development, in the highest and noblest form, it is not strong. It does not tend to a universal reign of God through intelligent regenerated men, organized in free, self-governed people.

On the other hand, Congregationalism is powerful in this direction. It centralizes the local church around God's word in the Bible as its supreme law of thought, feeling, and action. It aims to bring each individual under the direct influence of God, through the Bible. It thus makes God the great centre of all things, and not a human monarch, nor the church. It aims to make each man a king and a priest to God, intelligent, God-governed.

Thus the rejection of the hierarchal principle, that is sometimes alleged as the weakness of Congregationalism, is the very source of its peculiar and highest power; for it centres all things around God in his word.

Congregational Councils.

We are now able to understand the grand peculiarity of Congregational councils. They are a mode of securing and expressing that unity, sympathy, co-operation, and fellowship among Christians, which grow out of the nature of God and the universality of his kingdom, *without introducing the hierarchal principle.*

Viewed in their relations to God, there is a unity among all regenerated persons, which they can neither make nor unmake. They are, in the nature of things, so united to Christ, that, in the strong language of inspiration, they are "members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones."

If they act in sympathy with God, through his word, they must aim at the same great ends. They are one by reason of the unity of divine thought, ends, purposes, and emotions, proceeding from that God who is above all, and in all, and through all. Hence from the nature of God, and the universality of his kingdom, originates a unity, sympathy, co-operation, and fellowship, among all Christian churches, which Congregationalism acknowledges its obligation to develop and preserve.

The hierarchal principle it regards, as we have seen, not only as not adapted to this end, but as in spirit diametrically opposed to it. It therefore excludes it.

This exclusion of the hierarchal principle is the grand peculiarity of Congregational councils. As soon as they lose this, the system loses its vital element of power, and is transformed into one of the many hierarchal systems with which Christendom has been filled.

A council is an assemblage of the representatives of any number of Congregational churches, to investigate and give light on doctrinal or practical questions of common interest, to give advice in difficult cases, to express fellowship, to aid in forming churches, in ordaining and dismissing pastors, in conducting difficult cases of discipline, and in removing divisions and dissensions.

A council convened for any of these ends receives its fundamental character from two great facts: 1. that the Bible, and that alone, is its fundamental constitution and only standard; 2. that the churches retain the right of judging all its decisions by the Bible, and accepting or rejecting them, as they are found to agree with it. On this point, the Cambridge Platform is express. Concerning the decisions of synods and councils they say, that they are, "*so far as consonant to the word of God, to be received with reverence and submission;*" without such agreement, they say, "*they bind not at all.*" Of course the churches must judge for themselves of this agreement. In general, they say that "synods and councils are not to exercise church censures in a way of discipline, nor any act of church authority or jurisdiction." In these views eminent Congregational writers are unanimous.

If, in view of this statement, it should be alleged, as it often is, that councils are devoid of power, let the following things be considered:

1. That personal holiness, and a sense of the presence of God, and prayer, all of which the Bible requires in a council, do more than anything else to remove the causes of error and division, and to lead into all truth, whether doctrinal or practical.

2. That the truth itself, when clearly stated, in a right spirit, has great power.

3. That the aid of the Holy Spirit is always granted to those who act prayerfully, and in the name of Christ, in such assemblies.

4. That those who are to be acted on are, as a general fact, regenerated, spiritual men, even if in error or in sins.

Bearing these things in mind, it cannot but be that a Congregational council, *conducted in the true spirit of the system*, should be a body of great power. It is indeed a peculiar kind of power, and so is that of the gospel. The wisdom of God in convincing of sin, in reforming, in guiding into the truth, is concentrated in the gospel. It is the design of a council to develop and to rely on this peculiar power. Errors, delusions, divisions, have their roots in the heart. It is the design of councils, through the revelation of God in the gospel, to reach and to remove the root of the evil, to invigorate the regenerated spiritual nature, and to destroy the power of the flesh. This is especially true in cases of discipline, or of division and strife.

Nothing can better illustrate these principles than a reference to actual facts. In a work by William Wisner, D.D., entitled "Incidents in a Pastor's Life," on p. 114, occur's the following statement: "A congregation in central New York was thrown into great disorder, and for years had its influence for good paralyzed by a quarrel between two of the leading families in the village. Various efforts had been made to settle the difficulty without effect, when the church, with the consent of the contending parties, agreed to submit the whole matter to a number of ministers not belonging to that presbytery, of whom I was one. Invitations were accordingly sent to those persons who had been agreed upon by the church and the parties, and we all assembled, on the day appointed, to enter upon the business for which we had been selected. I was chosen chairman of the council, and the parties were present with their advocates and their witnesses, all in readiness to commence the contest. But as the council belonged to other presbyteries than the one with which that church

stood connected, I called for *the commission* under which we were to act; when, to our surprise, we were informed that *their presbytery* had not even been consulted on the subject. We at once agreed that we had no power to act officially in the matter, but recommended to the church and the parties to unite with us in a season of prayer for the gracious interposition of God's Spirit. All seemed to fall in with this proposal, and we adjourned from the place which was intended as the arena for a desperate conflict between the brethren, to a place where prayer was wont to be made. As this was about ten o'clock in the morning, we continued at the throne of grace until twelve, when we had a recess for dinner. After dinner we reassembled, and engaged again in our supplications for the restoration of peace and love to that afflicted church. In a short time one of the offending parties came forward, and, with many tears, confessed that he had been awfully guilty, and begged the forgiveness of God, of the other party, and of the church, for his unchristian conduct. As soon as he sat down, the other party came and insisted that he was the guilty originator of the trouble, and that if his brother had done wrong, it was in consequence of provocation which he had given, and he wished the forgiveness of his brother and of the church and of God. The two principals having thus been brought to repentance, those who had become their partisans followed their example, and, for a long time we sat there hearing brethren who had been engaged in an unholy strife, confessing their sins to one another, and praying for one another." From this originated a revival of religion, of which he gives an account.

Here are presented the true elements of that highest power, to which a council may always resort, a sense of the presence of God, the quickening of the spiritual nature, the illuminating and the searching power of the divine Spirit, and the vision of eternal realities. In this case, the church in fact had assumed the Congregational right to call a council without leave from the presbytery. The want of

a presbyterial commission prevented the formal and legal action, which they would have taken under presbytery. The hierarchal connection ceased. They became, in fact, a Congregational council, at least in spirit, and resorted to prayer. Nothing could have been done better adapted, or more powerful, to secure the end aimed at. The gospel is not a system of law, but of love and of divine influence and of heart-searching power. Such should ever be the atmosphere created by a council; such the power on which it relies. Well does Dr. Wisner say: "contentions among brethren always grow out of the want of a heavenly mind, and usually take place in the absence of the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit." The power of a council, then, in such a case, lies in the restoration of that which has been lost, and in a manifested sense of the presence of God. This is especially important in all cases of division and contention. But it is universally true of all councils, that a devotional atmosphere should predominate in them. A formal acknowledgment of God is not enough. If it be true that the Lord giveth wisdom, then prayer is the most powerful mode of gaining wisdom for others, on all subjects on which a council is called to act.

In accordance with these views, the national Congregational council, which is soon to assemble at Boston, will devote the whole of the first day to prayer. Questions of doctrine, of church order, and of benevolent enterprise, will come before them. But on all questions, nothing can throw so much light as the presence of the divine Spirit, and a powerful development of the spirit of self-sacrifice and self-denial for the good of others, in accordance with the example of him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. This is the vital essence of Christianity. This is its true doctrinal, organic, and practical power. The field is wide. The necessities are obvious. An unparalleled work of Christian evangelism and organization for our country is needed. The great practical question is: Has the denomination the

power, liberality, self-sacrifice, and self-denial needed to meet the emergency?

It appears from this general view of Congregational councils, that they differ greatly in principles and spirit from those assemblies known in church history, after the second century, as councils. These were based on the hierarchal principles, and passed authoritative canons. This introduced into the church a kind of canonic literature, which has expanded into folios, and, like the Jewish traditions condemned by Christ, made the word of God of no effect. This principle of hierarchal unity required councils above councils as larger territories were represented, and metropolitans and patriarchs to preside in them; and an attempt at an organized universal hierarchy was the logical result. There has indeed been some dispute in this hierarchy as to the supremacy; some placing it in the pope, others exalting a general council above him. But by securing the right to call the council or not, at his pleasure, the pope, in fact, has carried the day.

The restorers of Congregationalism were well acquainted with the history and effects of such councils, as one main cause of the subversion of the original Congregationalism, and it is not surprising that at first they should apply some other name to their own assemblies, based on a denial of the hierarchal principle. Accordingly we find, in the old writers, that they are called by various descriptive names, such as conferences, consociations, conventions, synods, rather than councils. But their advisory nature, or some other reason, has led to the adoption of the term "councils," for the common and smaller assemblies of the representatives of the churches, applying the term "synod" or "consociation" to the larger and less frequent gatherings. But at last, usage is extending the name to what would formerly have been called a synod. Our national council is the legitimate successor of the general synods of New England.

Ideals of Congregational Development in the Future.

Congregationalism, since its modern restoration, has acted in circumstances opposed to the proper development of its real tendencies and full power. It began its career in the midst of compactly organized ecclesiastical hierarchies covering the whole ground. Of course it could not act on society according to the original idea of its divine Founder. Let us consider what would be involved in this, and what would be the results of Congregationalism were it to become universal.

Let us then suppose that the Congregational principle of unity, intellectual, moral, sympathetic, among free local churches, to the exclusion of all hierarchal organizations, has obtained the ascendancy.

One obvious result would be, the cessation of the division of local churches among many independent upper organizations covering the same ground. Then the Christian population of each locality could form itself into as many local churches as should be needed, and could properly be sustained. Then would come to an end the extravagant system of multiplied feeble local churches, to which rival hierarchies give rise, and the waste of resources, collision of interests, jealousy, proselytism, and unbelief which necessarily result.

In the primitive church, there was not even one such upper hierarchal organization. Mosheim has on this point stated the truth so emphatically, that we quote his words: "All the churches in those primitive times were independent bodies; or none of them subject to the jurisdiction of any other. For though the churches which were founded by the apostles themselves frequently had the honor shown them to be consulted in difficult and doubtful cases; yet they had no judicial authority, no control, no power of giving laws. On the contrary, it is as clear as the noon-day that all Christian churches had *equal rights*, and were, in all respects, on a footing of equality. Nor does there appear in this first century any vestige of that *conso-*

ciation of the churches of the same province which gave rise to *ecclesiastical councils* and to *metropolitans*. But rather, as is manifest, it was not till the second century that the custom of holding ecclesiastical councils first began in Greece, and thence extended into other provinces" (Murdoch's Mosheim, I. 72).

In a Christian population there are always strong tendencies to local unity, which will organize, in the requisite number of local churches, all who are not divided by fundamental doctrinal error. The departing principle, the principle of waste and extravagant expenditure, is found in the upper hierarchal organizations. Let it be but once universally conceded that these are in opposition to the unity at which Christ aimed, and to the highest development of his kingdom, and the great, the all-pervading principle of division and of repulsion among Christians will be done away, and the true principles of Christian unity will begin to operate with a power unknown before. God, through his word, will centralize, unite, and control his free and holy churches with a divine, all-pervading, joy-diffusing power of light and love.

Another result would be, the opening of the way for the removal of doctrinal differences among Christians, by an unobstructed comparison of views, and a reference of all things to the divine standard of truth—the word of God. Nothing has so great power to neutralize and arrest candid investigation and comparison of views, as the existing hierarchal organizations. They are bound to defend, by their whole organic power, all that is within their respective enclosures. Creeds become, not declarations of doctrinal results, reached at particular times, to be used in the study of doctrinal development, in which light they are of great use, but fixed doctrinal standards, above the Bible, and between the churches and the Bible. Remove the hierarchal principle, let no hierarchal interests divide the Christian community into fixed organizations, holding together their elements by powerful organic attractions, let the Bible

and the true laws of interpretation and development have full sway, and a candid comparison of views be unobstructed, and existing doctrinal differences would be finally removed, and all of the sacramental host see eye to eye.

Another result would be, an increase of patience in thought and investigation, as opposed to the haste and authoritative decisions of hierarchies. All decisions made in haste and under excitement, by the mere power of a majority of votes, are simply adjournments of discussion to other and better times and circumstances. No decision will permanently stand that is not based on truth. But all hierarchies tend to a hasty decision, by majorities, according to existing standards. On the other hand, Congregationalism tends to patient thought, full discussion, and a decision by the Bible. This operation of the system, in certain well-known cases, is so well set forth by Professor Park, that we cannot do better than to use his words :

“When President Edwards promulgated his views, the clergy opposed him. His friends were few, his foes were the vast majority of staid and gentlemanly divines. Had he and they been trained under an authoritative organization of churches, there is little doubt that he would have been summoned before their tribunal, and, in its summary action, every member of the court inflaming every other, and all of them in a state altogether unfit for grave deliberation on intricate themes, he would have been condemned, and in all likelihood a new denomination would have been started, and its differences from the old would have been exaggerated, and its distance from the old would have been looked upon as a great gulf. But he appealed to the sober men of the country, wherever he could find them; they reflected, each man for himself, and some approved, others doubted; and the more part could see no reason broad enough to warrant their refusal of fellowship with him; and so the truth increased mightily. His friend Hopkins was thus encouraged to show his opinion. The clergy resisted him. He was reasoned against and rhymed against.

If he and his enemies had been drilled under a concentrated government of churches, he also, in all likelihood, would have been summoned for trial, and in the haste and heat of his judges, each one igniting the other, and disqualifying the other for a patient study of his analyses, he too would have been the cause of a new explosion in the church, one fragment repelling, and repulsed by its antagonist. But he sought out the calm thinkers of the land, fit readers, though few; he sent his volumes to the farmers and the merchants. They read; each man by himself reflected; some received, others disowned his views, and the majority chose to see them discussed, rather than to see the church divided; and so again the word of the Lord grew. The essential spirit of Calvinism made a bold stride. The friend of Hopkins, Emmons, was thus emboldened to publish his investigations. He had more clerical friends than either Edwards or Hopkins; but they were less numerous than his opponents; and if a church court could have seized upon him, he would have been crushed under its quick-rolling wheels, and schismatics would have been multiplied, and the denomination would have again been riven asunder. But he knew the patience of the people, their proverbial slowness to condemn any man who *means well*, and is *about* right; and he threw his sermons among them; they looked and pondered; many disbelieved; some approved; but the dominant opinion was, that a sound creed would be preserved by candid thought longer than by judicatories and schisms; and thus again the old faith of the church was yet more surely embedded in the heart of the people."

Another result of Congregationalism would be, the production of thinking, intelligent, self-governed, or rather God-governed people. A Congregational church is a school for all those traits of character which fit a people for self-government. Relying not on authority and forms, and sacraments, but on truth, and holiness, and the fear of God, it demands and encourages popular education, and the

highest standard of practical morality. It trains men to reason and think, and to bear responsibility. Thus it creates the elements of free, intelligent, God-fearing, self-governed people.

A final result would be, the sanctification of all departments of human society, and the full development and establishment of the kingdom of God. There would be no union or confusion of church and state. The church universal would not be organized under one great hierarchy, or under divided hierarchies. The Christian element, united in free local churches, would be universally diffused. The majority of the people, or even all of them, would be converted to God, and would act in his fear and love, and on his principles in all departments of life.

Congregationalism assumes that the regeneration and sanctification of fallen men is the end of this world, and that this is to be effected by a definite system of truth revealed in the Bible. It assumes that the system of natural material life is analogical to that system of truth, and in harmony with it, and with it makes one great whole, adapted to gain the divine ends of human society in this world. It assumes that this great system, as a whole, ought to be pervaded and controlled by the love of God and a regard to his great ends. When this is done, men will be free, human society will be simple, loving, and not despotic or oppressive, and God will be above all, and in all, and through all.

Congregationalism assumes, also, a divine influence of the Holy Spirit to make this great system of truth apparent, not being limited to the department of theology, but pervading all fields of human thought. It assumes a self-revealing power of God, such that it shall make his being real, and cheer all men by his universally-diffused thoughts and emotion, just as the sun reveals himself by light and heat. This is the essential element of the kingdom of God. This is its all-pervading power. The full development of the kingdom of God is divinely set forth by this very symbol. "The

sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended (Isa. lx. 19, 20).

Congregationalism has never been anywhere perfectly developed according to its true and highest ideal. At an early period it was subverted by the hierarchal principle, and human canons and traditions. It was still more excluded from its true place and from regaining its power by the union of church and state. Even the Protestant reformation did not remedy this abuse. That work of emancipation was reserved for later ages, and for this continent. An entire redemption from hierarchies of all kinds is yet in the future. It may be that the experiment of hierarchies not united to the state may yet demand some time in the providence of God, in order to bring out the truth by the revelations of history.

Meantime the view which has been taken should, at this important crisis of our history, impress upon all Congregationalists two great lessons.

The first is, that the full and perfect development of the system can be secured only by the highest degrees of holiness and communion with God. When the hierarchal principle is entirely renounced, when the centralizing power of great organizations is gone, then there is no uniting and organic power left but the influence of God. But this power, truly used, is enough. It may be developed beyond any conceivable limits. If it is developed in a high degree, it is the greatest intellectual and moral power that can enter the world. Many things will become practicable and attainable, which are hopeless without it. To meet the emergencies of the present day and of the future, it must be secured, in extent and power, to a degree hitherto unknown. Until this is done, the system of Congregationalism will not

be seen in its true power and glory. There will be a constant tendency to abuse it by bringing into it the spirit of a hierarchy, by which the system will be perverted and misused. Hierarchical systems have repeatedly infused their spirit into its administration, and always with evil results. Its true power is not hierarchical, but divine.

The great practical questions of the age, then, are: To what degree are we authorized to expect communion with God? and, How shall it be secured?

The second lesson is, that this communion with God should not be limited to the religious sphere, technically so called, but should be extended to all departments of human life. It is time more profoundly to study what, and how much, is involved in this. The sanctification of the whole social system is the last and highest work of God, and it is to be effected through the people. The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, are to be given, not to a monarchy, but to *the people* of the saints of the Most High. In this great nation, God has put the power into the hands of the people, in order that they may rule for him. But how can they do it unless they study what it involves? And how can they do this except they are taught? The Congregational churches, as eminently the advocates and leaders of the great popular movement, are imperatively called on to study this momentous problem. Nor does it involve a leaving of their proper sphere. Religion cannot have perfect soundness, so long as any department of human life is conducted on irreligious principles. We have seen the malignant power of slavery to corrupt religion and lead to apostasy. Unchristianized systems of political economy, commerce, and government, exert the same corrupting power. The leaven of the gospel has not done its work until it has leavened the whole lump.

Now that God has smitten slavery unto death, he has opened the way for the redemption and sanctification of our whole social system, which was before impossible. We are

therefore loudly called upon to study this problem as never before.

In making these remarks as to Congregationalism and its responsibilities, we are not conscious of a want of love or respect towards Christians of any name. On the other hand, we speak as we do because we love them, and because we desire Christian unity in a higher degree than ever before. We feel that the unity of this great nation cannot be preserved permanently by any power lower than the uniting power of God, exerted through his united people. This is adequate for all time and all circumstances. Nothing else is.

Our government, too, by reason of its vast resources and immense patronage, is in great, constant, and imminent danger of corruption. How shall this corruption be averted? How shall it be exhibited to the world pure, benevolent, and glorious? There is but one way. God must animate it through a free and holy people. The people must be all righteous. Then will the national government truly represent them, and be pure and glorious.

To reach these results, an inconceivable degree of moral power is needed, high, high above anything that has yet been attained. How shall it be secured? It can be only by the observance of the great, the divine laws of unity, ordained by God, and involved in the very nature of things.

It has been our purpose to discuss these laws, not, as we rust, under the influence of denominational pride, but from a sincere desire of the speedy and glorious coming of the kingdom of God.

It is conceded by all that no progress can be made in the development of the powers of the natural system, but by obedience to its laws. Obedience to the laws of fluids, ordained by God, has given us the steam-engine, with its wondrous powers. Obedience to the laws of electro-magnetism has given us the telegraph, and its miracles of communication and intercourse.

And are there not laws of life and union in God, as real and irrevocable as any of the laws of this material world?

Have not these laws been long enough disregarded? Have not the divisive tendencies of hierarchal unity, so called, been sufficiently developed? Is it not time to ask: Is there not a real, a higher unity, of which God is the direct and constant author, and which needs no hierarchy for its full development; nay, which repudiates all hierarchies as at war with its very first principles?

Nor is it for man's sake merely that these questions should be asked. True, there is a joy and a strength of universal Christian unity, after the ideal of Christ, of which there has been as yet but little practical knowledge—a joy unspeakable and full of glory. And no words can state the worth or the power of that joy.

But high above this should we place the wishes and purposes and joys of God. There is a unity contemplated by Christ in that intercessory prayer with which he closed his earthly labors. A unity that is to affect the world. Has that unity yet been realized? There is a unity involved in the gift to the bride, the Lamb's wife, to put on fine linen, clean and white, and to prepare herself for the marriage supper of the Lamb. Has this unity yet been realized? And as there are laws by which the wonders of the material system have come to pass; so there are laws by which the wonders of the spiritual system are to be developed. Is it not time to study those laws and to obey them, even more for God's sake than for our own?

The full force and real import of the scriptural phrase *the kingdom of God* ought to be more profoundly studied, and more sympathetically realized. It has receded from the current thought of most Christian denominations. Its unity, its universality, its power and glory, are dimly seen and faintly felt, if at all. And yet, in an eminent sense, it is true that the kingdom of God is at hand. He is to reign through emancipated and regenerated free people. No part of De Tocqueville's great work on Democracy is more sublime than his Introduction, in which he unfolds the great democratic movement of God's providence for ages, powerful

alike, whether men oppose or aid. It filled him, he says, with religious awe in the contemplation. If we succeed in our war for liberty and union, new power will be added, even our enemies being judges, to the great democratic movement of the ages.

Is it not time for us to look upon this great movement in its ultimate relations to the kingdom of God, and more clearly to conceive what the coming of that kingdom implies?

It is God who is to reign. God is to be king over all the earth. The theory of a divine reign through hierarchies, leaving the people ignorant and passive, has had its full trial. The reign of God through free, intelligent, regenerated people, is to have its day. Is it not time thoroughly to understand the conditions of this great problem?

ARTICLE VI.

GEORGE CALIXTUS.¹

BY CHARLES M. MEAD, M.A., BERLIN, PRUSSIA.

THE first half of the seventeenth century was a period fruitful of abiding influence on the succeeding condition of Germany. The treaty of 1555, which conceded to the several states the management of their own ecclesiastical affairs — a concession of which the Protestants did, but the Roman Catholics did not, avail themselves — secured, indeed,

¹ The materials of this Article are taken from "George Calixtus und seine Zeit," by Professor Henke, of Marburg, Hessen-Cassel. In this work, consisting of two octavo volumes, the subject is presented with a master's hand, a view being given not only of Calixtus's life and labors, but also, as fully as the nature of the work admits, of the general political and ecclesiastical condition of Germany, particularly of Brunswick, during the period treated of. Without attempting any further analysis or criticism of Henke's work, we avail ourselves of it in composing the following sketch.