

## ARTICLE II.

## IMPENDING CHANGES IN CONGREGATIONALISM.

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SOMETHING more than the fact that a new century has begun, makes a diagnosis of the age opportune. Thoughtful men realize that they are navigating waters where currents meet and surge; or, to change the figure, that they are living at a time when the topography of systems of belief and forms of polity are being changed by the heavings of fires within.

Landmarks that once were thought safe to steer by, and as everlasting, are gone. New peaks to guide the mariner have emerged. The tremors of the upheaval unnerve many, just as does the earthquake's weird and ominous thrill. There is an atmosphere of uncertainty as to the future, a disinclination to dogmatize; the mood of the hour is one of toleration, not only because some think it a lofty mood, but because others deem it a prudent mood. Reverent agnosticism is now permissible where formerly joyful certitude was thought to be indispensable. These are all signs of man's intuitive feeling or reasoned conviction that striking changes have come recently in the realm of theology and the realm of polity, and that other changes are impending.

Here and there pioneers who have forged ahead, fought with the enemy, explored the new territory, and sounded the depths of its streams and riches of its mines are certain that a New Epoch for Faith has arrived. But, to change the figure again and abruptly, the ground-swell of the storm which a few

have outridden or are outriding is still giving many a navigator—clerical and lay—serious qualms as to whether his anchors will hold if he elects to lie by, or whether his boat will breast and surmount the waves if he sails out into the gale and on the open sea.

What are some of the signs of the times?

Philosophical materialism is passing, but practical materialism is rife. Whether more or less than formerly is an open question on which wise and good men disagree, and it is not a question pertinent to this discussion. But that practical materialism is sufficiently diffused and dominant to cause some of the purest of American patriots and most loyal advocates of democracy to be pessimistic as to the future, will be conceded by all who are in touch with the thought of the time as it finds expression in sermon, current literature, and conversation. The state as an institution waxes mightier as men concede to it collective power formerly carefully retained by individuals. The school, symbolizing learning, multiplies numerically, adds to its endowment at a prodigious rate, both through gifts of individuals and public taxation, and grows in favor with Democracy, whether deemed an instrument for culture or for utilitarian ends. *Per contra*, both the church and the family wane in prestige and relative place in the social structure under the disintegrating influence of individualistic tendencies and standards of belief and conduct.

Economically and politically speaking, the individual man is losing much of his former liberty of choice, at the same time that domestically, intellectually, and spiritually he is gaining more. Authority is shifting from office to character, from institutions to individuals. It is becoming intrinsic rather than extrinsic, personal rather than official, at least in the church and family, and to some extent at least in the state.

Last, but not least, emphasis upon the subjective aspects of human thought and conduct, clearer knowledge of institutional origins, the growth of doctrine and development of codes of ethics; a passing over into the realm of Faith and Conduct of Science's dictum as to the relativity of truth; and man's accumulating knowledge, derived through induction, of the infinite variety of point of view which differing heredity, environment, attainment, and ambition among men make not only possible but certain—all these are subtly but surely working against an aforesaid spirit of dogmatism, against confidence in the finality of definitions and fixity of forms which formerly were the bulwark of religion on its creedal and institutional sides, and this among Protestants as well as among Roman Catholics; for with the former the Reformation brought only a partial break with the static or deposit theory of truth.

Here it is a time of flux; there a time of crystallization. Varieties of intellectual and spiritual climate in the same community and in the same church to-day are as many as the varieties of climate within the borders of the United States. Some live in and are content with the ideals of an individualistic gospel, a Jeffersonian democracy, a master-and-servant order of industry; others believe in "a world a subject of redemption," a republic playing the part of an elder brother with dependencies in tutelage, and do not fear to see the state gradually made supreme in industry, all citizens being partners. Some abide with satisfaction in provincialism and sectionalism; others welcome enlarged nationalism, and intensified race consciousness. Some are loyal, convinced, and unalterable sectarians; others labor for denominational federation, and others for organic church unity. Some are of Paul or Apollos, some of Calvin or Wesley; and others are believers

in the supremacy of the present Holy Spirit, and call no man master. Some conceive of God as transcendent but only immanent in a very unmoral and unspiritual way; others believe in him as preëminently immanent; others as immanent but also transcendent.

Some conceive of the church as an end in itself; others as a means to an end—the Kingdom of God, instrument or means undergoing expected and proper eclipse or extinction as the end is gained. Some are in the stage of analysis of all the fundamental beliefs of philosophy, theology, or ethics; others have passed into the stage of synthesis or reconstruction; some know nothing of either analysis or synthesis, of either philosophy or theology, but, with mystic faith, and reliance on data derived from personal experience of God and his love, live untroubled in a troublous time. Some are still courtiers of Science, and think her sovereign everywhere; while others understand that her realm hath its strict bounds, and look forward with hope to serving once more with undivided loyalty in the realms of philosophy and theology.

It is to churches as composite as these conditions would imply, that the clergyman of to-day is asked to minister with satisfaction to all; and the wonder is that, even when his own mind is clear and his own pathway straight before him, he is able as often as he is to serve with wisdom and to mutual edification, and of course he does it best and most surely when he is deeply religious, and appeals to the universal religious needs and aspirations in language that is vital, because born of the experience of ordinary men in all times at all stages of history. It is doubtful whether the average layman to-day who is immersed in business or burdened with civic responsibilities is conversant with the intellectual, spiritual, and administrative

problems of the clergy ; or, if he is conversant, declares as often and fully as he should his sympathy for the clergy. The minister's task to-day is vastly more difficult than his father's or his grandfather's task—if the minister chance to be of a long line of divines ; and when he succeeds, his victory is that much the greater, and more deserving of recognition and praise.

To an age, then, which is more inchoate, turbulent, and complex than any which has gone before ; which, thanks to applied science, has accumulated means of living a more complex outer physical life faster than it has accumulated ethical motive and spiritual inspiration for the inner life, comes a polity like the Congregational, its form and its traditions—intellectual, spiritual, and social—making for simplicity, individuality, and emphasis upon personality ; and they face each other, the simple polity and all its traditions emphasizing individualism and personality on the one hand, and on the other the ever more complex social structure, disposed in many of its most effective functionings as an organism to sacrifice the individual for the many. What is to be the outcome of this clash?

Loyalty to type, but constant adjustment to environment, may be assumed as a sound policy for one concerned with the healthy growth of an institution whether political or ecclesiastical. Unprejudiced scholars' investigations of the origins of the church in its many forms show the past workings of that law ; and we have but to look about us to see how the Episcopal type of church government, whether Roman, Anglican, or Methodist Episcopal, has been altered by the irresistible democratic, individualistic atmosphere of the United States, creating within bodies which are nominally Episcopal a very large and ever-increasing measure of Congregationalism. This process in this country has been the fruit of the impact of political ideals upon ecclesiastical. Democracy in state, and assertion

of individual rights in the forum, has been echoed in the church courts, and done its modifying work. Now there is seen clearly impending, as the result of economic and industrial changes and the ever-increasing influence of trade and commerce upon all political relations, national and international, a new era in which both state and church will be affected by the environment with its new ideals,—ideals that have to do more with administration than with belief, with service than with faith, with polity than with creed. And as the environment ideals of the world have affected the church in this country in the past, congregationalizing Episcopacy, so the tendencies and ideals of the future bid fair to episcopize Congregationalism, the ultimate end seemingly being a polity which has place for both the supervising principle as it conserves effective administration, and the independent principle as it guards intellectual and spiritual liberty, ritual variety, and local, lay control of the purse, and choice of clergy.

No one facing the life of the American people to-day can deny that we live in a time when the humanistic, Hellenistic aspects and theories of life are competing with the Hebraic and Puritan ideals of our fathers; and the problem for the Christian church is to keep the ancient and honored Jew, and welcome the young and suspected Greek; and prove to each that there is room for him in the family of God.

Who is so ignorant or dense as to fail to see that this generation has an altered attitude toward Nature, and that there is a growing recognition of Nature's capacity to minister not only to man's physical betterment, but also to his spiritual elevation? Art, which, even where in former days it had its devotees among the descendants of the Puritan settlers of New England, was a closed preserve kept for the wealthy or well-to-do, is now becoming the open demense of the many. Jour-

nalism, popular education, cheap and comfortable modes of travel, and private generosity to museums of art plus intelligent vending of art-products by our merchants,—all these factors are conspiring both to stimulate and satisfy instincts which were latent in our forefathers, but which were either suppressed entirely or starved both in the home life and the church worship of most of our Pilgrim and Puritan ancestors; and this because there was no place for beauty in the philosophy of the day nor in its theology. The dominant note was that of ascetism, mortification of the flesh, and a boycott of that which was symbolical or æsthetic.

Now the beauty and holiness of bodily strength and perfection of physical development and functioning is taught in our public schools, urged in our newspapers, and inculcated in our homes. Spiritual and mental health are now known to be conditioned by physical health more than we ever dared believe in former times. Life in the open air and intelligent conservation of health are increasing the stature of our youth, enhancing their physical beauty and strength, and making them fitter for parenthood.

There is a revolt, too, based on reason and having the backing of science, against the ascetic standards of the past, and against the prohibitory mood. Temperance and sobriety are the ideal. Self-realization by proper development of all the powers, rather than by deprivation or extirpation of any powers, is a popular and increasingly commanding philosophy of life among the more intelligent and high-minded folk of this country. In addition, on the philosophical and psychological sides, there is a new conception of the valid place of the imagination as a factor in religion, a clearer understanding of the ancient origin of symbolism and its rational basis, and juster appreciation of the valid place of the formal and ritualistic as-

pects of religion kept within right bounds and co-existent with spontaneous prayer, testimony, and exhortation.

Some of the practical aspects of this phase of our problem are obvious, and pertinent to all the Reformed churches, but especially to descendants of the Puritans. Our fathers and mothers and we of this generation have been trained for our life in a world chiefly of the understanding. But our children in their public or private schools are being trained in the worlds of the imagination and the affections as well as in the realm of the understanding. Their school life, their play life, are lives of emphasis on beauty as well as on duty, on loving aright as well as thinking accurately and logically. This discipline, especially among girls, continues if they go to college; the impulse governs and the ideal abides when they become wives and adorn their homes, and train their children. It has a cumulative effect, shaping their attitude toward the drama, the opera, poetry, the plastic arts, athletic games, use of time in studying Nature, and the like.

Nevertheless, most of the Protestant churches go calmly on, expecting that children and youth so trained and so regarding life, will, when they enter the realms of religion and of social worship, still be satisfied with the barren meeting-house, the ascetic ideal in ethics, and the chance that the preacher in his spontaneous prayers and in his sermon may appeal to the imagination and to the feelings of his hearers as well as to their understandings.

No one can compare what *is done* unchallenged now in our leading non-liturgical denominations with what *was not done* a generation ago, without realizing that, in our larger centers of population and in our wealthier churches at least, there has been some adaptation of services and code of conduct to the spirit of the age. But it has been in the main the choice of lo-

cal churches, the influence of individuals in the pulpits; it yet has to get the sanction of denominations as such, or to profit by any constructive ecclesiastical statesmanship directed toward enrichment of the worship of all the churches, and toward formulation of a less rigorous, saner, disciplinary code.

This humanistic movement has too many agents, educational, journalistic, and social, back of it to be resisted. An ever-increasing number of people each year, the dwellers in the small towns as well as those in the cities, are affected by it. Failure to reckon with it, to adapt polity and message to it, will mean a lessened hold of the church on sections of the population that hitherto have contributed much to the strength of the churches, namely graduates of schools and colleges, and the traveled well-to-do.

Churches with polities that limit the authority of executive officials, that emphasize the rights of local churches, that assert the voluntary principle, are being made aware also of another group of social phenomena which are adverse to the democratic, loosely coördinated polity of Congregationalism, or the representative polity of Presbyterianism.

In the state life of to-day it is a time when emphasis is being put upon the common race-tie rather than upon tribal differences, upon imperial rather than upon national or provincial prestige, upon federal powers rather than upon state rights; and if it be a matter of municipal government, then upon the city's welfare as a whole rather than on neighborhood wishes. Moreover, democracy, in its distrust of its legislative representatives, is not only relying more and more upon power delegated and vested constitutionally in executives, to bring to pass such ends in government as it conceives best for itself, but it is putting more and more discretionary legislative power into the hands of administrative officials, finding that it

makes for celerity of execution, efficiency in action, and honesty of administration. Likewise in matters of legislation, there is a disposition to make it as uniform in its provisions and range as possible, local caprice or whim or honest conviction even counting for less with lawmakers than formerly. Differentiation of individual belief and practice, if making for social waste or inefficiency, is being abolished. The ideal of political government to-day is a maximum of efficiency and economy with a minimum of interference with individual rights and points of view, but the emphasis is coming to be more on duties, less on rights; more on the social good, less on the individual's preference and will.

Much the same condition of things is found if we turn to the administration of the international policing of the world. Military authority centralizes more and more in a general staff of experts, who, both in peace and war, study out those courses of strategy, those policies of equipment and handling of masses of men, on which victory in war hinges. Their joint opinion and common policy, the product of combined expert advice, is seen to be a safer reliance than the genius of any individual extemporizing his plan of campaign after war is declared.

In commerce and industry the movement of events is all in the same direction. Combination and not competition is the word of the hour. A maximum of product with a minimum of expenditure of capital, of superintending skill, of labor, and of consumption of raw material; avoidance of all duplication of unnecessary machinery, and swift destruction of all machinery that is superseded; recognition of special creative and administrative aptitudes; employment of the expert,—these are some of the ideals which hover before our captains of industry in their effort to better American industrial and commercial conditions while they forget not to enrich themselves at the same time.

If we turn to education, the drift is the same way. The district as a school unit has passed away; the town with its central school and free transportation of pupils to it has taken its place as the unit of administration. Authority is centered more and more in expert superintendents and principals, and less in local boards of education who are direct representatives of the parents of the pupils. In many of our States where the educational system is crowned by the state university, its curriculum and standards influence and shape the curricula of the secondary and primary schools of the state, rather than they deciding its courses. In education, the expert has arrived, and with him and with uniformity of administrative scheme the vagaries of the non-expert and the independence of the local community and the individual parent are passing.

To be sure, along with this emphasis upon the larger units in government, this centralization of power in the hands of executives, boards of strategy, superintendents, etc., there also is—in the realm of the State for instance—frank recognition of the fact that municipal affairs must not be interfered with unduly, and that there often has been too much explicit, special legislation by States on matters better left to local officials. Never more than now in the art of war was it so important that privates and subordinate officers should have intelligence and initiative, and ability to fight out the battle after it has begun, each man for himself. Smokeless powder and new weapons of war have forced entire reconstruction of strategy, and diminished the importance of officers in time of battle, and have greatly magnified the importance of the private soldier, his intelligence and his initiative. Never did moral worth and individual capacity count for more in business than they do to-day with the vast concentration of power and responsibility in the hands of fewer men, nor was the need

of these qualities ever more acute in the ranks of organized labor, as the number of trades-unionists increases and their activity and power wax; while, in the sphere of education, the dominating thought with our best educators, back of all their concentration of administrative authority and uniformity of action on broad administrative and pedagogical lines, is the hope of conserving the individuality of the pupil.

The point to be kept in mind, however, is, that in statecraft, in the art of war, in commerce and industry, and in education, where "community of interest" is the watchword, where closer articulation of administrative parts is going on and centralization of power, and where economy of operation, swiftness of movement, and a maximum of results are the aims in view, the motive for it all is not the overriding of rights, but the better execution of duties; not enduement with power for power's sake, but for what power may do for beneficent ends. No one really believes, for instance, that this country is any less of a democracy in essence because the Federal Executive, with the flight of time and the evolution of the nation, has come to exercise power not definitely delegated to him, and which, as to the specific form it may take, is left to his own discretion. Nor do any of us really think that the transformed United States Army, with its general staff and up-to-date scientific scheme of organization,—the fruit of Hon. Elihu Root's marked gifts as an administrator,—is to be an instrument for our own oppression or the subjugation of others, or any the less effectively administered because scientifically organized. Nor do we as parents rise up and howl with indignation because our educational curricula, and our expenditures for education to a greater extent than formerly, are less a matter of our own determining and more that of experts.

Now it is men of the world, laymen in the pews, more or less conversant with the reasons lying back of these transformations in the administrative realm of the state and of business (but fully aware of them as facts), who come to inspection of the administrative side of American church life, and note inevitably the emphasis of individual or local independence, the absence of any vivid, abiding sense among the Christians of a given community of their mission to it as a community; the failure to federate for natural and legitimate ends; the competition within denominations and among denominations of agencies having the same ends in view; the duplication of theological seminaries, colleges, academies, periodicals, and missionaries, all aiming for the same thing, but calling for rival sets of officials and duplication of gifts. Facing the contrast between the way of the world and the way of the church, the layman begins to ask, whether it may not be now that the church has come to a point where it must be affected by the world, as well as the world be affected by it.

In the movements toward organic Christian unity between Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational brethren now taking shape in Australia and Canada, it has been very evident that the laity have favored the effort being made, if for no other reason than that it would put an end to the wasteful competition on home missionary fields, that it would settle educational problems involved in the rivalry and maintenance of competing theological schools and colleges, and that it would conserve the effective basal principles of both Congregationalism and Presbyterianism, namely the independence of the local church and the fellowship and supervisory power of the churches as a group. Along with the theoretical idealism of the clergy making for organic unity, along with the disintegrating influence on old opinions of investigations of church

historians showing the natural origin of polities and their primitive adaptation to conditions, suggesting present like adaptation, goes this demand of the laity, who control the state, pay the taxes for war, carry on the world's commerce, and endow the great schools and colleges, who are saying to those who would make much of old causes of difference, such as baptismal rites, metaphysical distinctions in Christology, apostolic origins and ordination, etc: "A truce to all your divisive cries and jarring notes. Get together in the spirit of adoration of a common Master, and joint service of men, quit doing twentieth-century tasks with machinery several centuries old, and stop your wasting rivalry."

Being in this mood, and under the spell of great dominant ideas in church and state, industry and education, that are to rule for this generation at least, the laity are in a mood to force the ecclesiastical reforms they deem necessary, by starving their opponents who obstruct, if it becomes necessary to use such drastic measures. One thing is certain, the laity of the country will not put money out freely for church uses until there is ecclesiastical reform. Pending which, they will give the Young Men's Christian Association unlimited capital because of its flexibility, swift adaptation to new conditions and problems, and concrete results easily ascertainable, as easily so as on any other capital invested. Money will continue to flow into the treasuries of libraries, colleges, hospitals, and altruistic agencies at a rate never approached in any other land at any other time. The Christian church will only get the layman's money on a generous scale when it develops ecclesiastical statesmen, and there is crying need of such in every denomination to-day—men who will rise above the controversies of past centuries, sacramental, doctrinal, and political, and will impress upon

their sectarian associates that the twentieth century has its own vital problems for the church, no one of which is so important just now, as the adaptation of the forms of institutional religion to the century's ideals of belief and service. Religion was never so strongly entrenched; institutional religion never was so weak relatively in men's hearts and so on the defensive.