

CONTEMPORARY OPINIONS.

The Mission of Congregationalists.

This title of an editorial article in a recent number of the Patriot newspaper, forcibly arrested our attention. What the Congregational Dissenters regard as their special providential calling has often been with us a matter of inquiry; and we turned to this article with some degree of eagerness, expecting to receive, on the authority of one of their own recognised organs, conclusive information upon the subject. The spirit of inquiry was awakened in our minds by two of their peculiarities. Several of their writers adopt a tone, in the advocacy of their system, different from that which pervades the defenses of other forms of Church Government among Protestant people. Mark, for instance, the difference between them and Wesleyan apologists of the Connexional principle. The zeal with which the latter recommend their system may sometimes expose them to the charge of bigotry; but they never speak of it as though they regarded it as the only system under which pure Christianity can flourish. They believe that it substantially embodies the great principles relating to Church order laid down in the New Testament. They regard it as the best of all systems for themselves; but they do not quarrel with their fellow-religionists because they prefer some other system which applies the principles of the New Testament in a different manner. Rarely do they refer to the difference between their own system and those of other religious bodies, except in self-defence. But this is not the course pursued by all the advocates of Independency. Some of the most prominent of these, no sooner approach the subject, than they appear to us, notwithstanding their denunciation of Popery, to vault at once into the chair of infallibility, from which, instead of maintaining the claims of Independency by sound argument, they dogmatize, as though they imagined that their judgment upon the subject ought to be at once received by others, as the only certain and authoritative interpretation of the mind of God.

The second peculiarity to which we refer is the proneness of the Independents to intermeddle with the affairs of other churches, which happens not to be formed according to their own model. The history of our Holy affords sufficient evidence of this. When has there arisen any agitation or dissension in the Wesleyan Society, which has not immediately called forth their interference? Did they step forward as mediators, it would be kind; it would be Christian; and they might scripturally expect that the blessing pronounced on "peace-makers" would be theirs. But the effect, and not infrequently the avowed design, of their interference has been to widen the breach, and fan the flame of discord which has been unhappily lit amongst us.

The consideration of these remarkable peculiarities has often led us to ask ourselves,—What is it which makes the Independents thus to differ from their fellow-Christians of other names? What do they really consider to be the vocation committed to them by the Great Head of the Church? And, we repeat it, that we turned with some eagerness to the recent article in the Patriot, expecting to receive an answer to our enquiry. In this expectation we have not been disappointed. The Independent oracle gives forth the following unmistakable response:—

"The Congregational Churches in this country have been entrusted by Providence with the fulfilment of a special mission. On them has devolved the important work of preparing the way for an ascendancy of religious liberty. Other denominations have generally advocated freedom of conscience in an occasional manner, and on the ground of expediency, rather than on that of conscience. Other denominations have been generally labouring only for themselves. Congregationalists, while struggling for a recognition of their own rights, have broken the fetters that would otherwise have shackled the efforts of other denominations. Others have generally felt themselves at liberty to attend exclusively to the embassy of peace between God and man. The Congregationalists have hitherto had a mission with reference to the Church as well as the world. They have had not only to make known to men the way of salvation, but also to teach their fellow-Christians of other denominations the Scripture doctrine concerning liberty of conscience; and successful as they may have previously been, it must be admitted that this part of their work is not yet complete, and that there are in the ecclesiastical compartments of our country, certain dark closets, through the crevices of which scarcely a ray of light has yet penetrated."

We cannot now adequately deal with the arrogant assumption contained in this quotation, that the Congregationalists have a "special mission" beyond all other denominations, to mould, modify, and interfere with the Churches which are in Christ. We must, for the present, content ourselves with fearlessly asserting, that the ample religious liberty which all bodies of separatists in this country now enjoy, under the protecting shade of law, is to be ascribed more to the influence and exertions of the Wesleyans than to the self-complacent religionists whom the Patriot represents. We must just now confine ourselves to the one point of what the Congre-

gationalists consider to be their vocation or mission. And here we have plainly avowed.—While other religious bodies have been generally labouring only for themselves, the Congregationalists have hitherto had a mission to the Church as well as to the world; and that peculiar mission has been "to teach their fellow-Christians of other denominations the Scripture doctrine concerning liberty of conscience." The plain English of all this, as we understand it, is, that while other religious bodies severally mind their own business, the Congregationalists, besides attending to their proper concerns, have the special prerogative of interfering with their neighbours, and regulating the affairs of other Churches also. Verily, we had suspected that this was the secret. We could not account for their interference in Methodist affairs on any other principle than that they imagined themselves to be charged with a special mission to rectify what they deem to be wrong in other religious communities, and fashion them according to their own model of Church order. This appeared to us to be the only consistent way of accounting for the very practical method which they adopt of teaching other Churches the doctrine of liberty of conscience. But now the secret is out; and very significant intimations are given respecting their future operations. Successful as the Congregationalists may have been in performance of their special mission, the Patriot says, "their work is not yet complete." That there are, in the ecclesiastical compartments of our country, certain dark closets, through the crevices of which scarcely a ray of light has yet penetrated. Well, how is their work to be brought to completion? In other words, how are they to introduce the light into the dark closets of our ecclesiastical compartments? How? Why, the narrow "crevices" must be enlarged; and, if this will not do, the walls of those "closets" must be knocked down, in order that "the light" of Congregational liberty may stream in upon the purblind inmates; and the Wesleyans, it seems, may confidently expect that whenever any agitation arises amongst them, the Banner of Liberty, on which the term British is inscribed, will be unfurled, and a Patriot voice will be heard summoning the Congregationalists to join the Agitators, and give the Wesleyan Section of the Church another practical lesson on "liberty of conscience."

Why has the Patriot published his expose of the views entertained by Congregationalists respecting their own special mission to reform other churches? Because the President of the Wesleyan Conference has given offence to the Patriot, and his co-workers in the same cause, by his remarks upon what he deemed their unseemly proceedings in the present disturbance which has arisen among the Wesleyans. It is made a matter of complaint that, in his recent able pamphlet—on the Duties and Responsibilities of the Wesleyan Conference, with a vindication of its recent Acts of Discipline—he has stepped out of his way to attack the Congregationalists. It is plain, on the Patriot's showing, that Mr. President Jackson has fallen into a great mistake. He was not aware of the special Mission of the Congregationalists. He found that some of his Independent neighbours had got into the Methodist House, were there were howling out blame against its interior arrangements, and detrating, and giving offence as to what must be done in the way of reform; and he, imbued with the notion, that an Englishman's house is his castle, bid them go home and mind their own affairs; at the same time (telling them that he did not consider their own domestic system so absolutely perfect as to be incapable of improvement. Fity that the President had not been sooner enlightened; he might then have been preserved from the grievous offence of resisting his Congregational neighbour in their zealous performance of the special Mission which they have received from Providence to reform the Methodist House.

The conclusion to which we are contented, on the review of this question, is truly painful. If the Patriot is the authorized exponent the views of the Congregationalists, as to what is really their Mission; if such journals as the Patriot and British Banner, in the oversight which they are now making upon the Wesleyan Connexion, are only giving a just express of the views and principles, not merely of those Dissenters, but of the great body of Congregationalists,—which however we earnestly hope and fully would believe, cannot be the case,—then the widening of the separation between the Congregationalists and the Wesleyans seems inevitable. There cannot be that mutual confidence between them which is essential to the cultivation of good feeling and Christian intercourse. The pleasing prospect which has been fondly anticipated, of a closer union amongst angelical Christians will be thrown to a great distance than ever; and no one may presume to calculate when, the prayer of the Saviour shall be accomplished, and his Church present its several sections, such an appearance of unity will convince the world of the Divinity of his Mission. If this union can only be effected by the breaking up all connexional bodies, and joining them anew on the platform of Independency, remote indeed will be the period of its

accomplishment. The Wesleyans, as a people, it would seem, will still have to be laboured, with a clearly defined line of demarcation drawn between them and the Establishment on the one hand, and the Dissenters on the other. But still, only let them take care that the fruit of a wide separation than that which has previously subsisted, be not their own, and let them apply themselves more vigorously than ever to their great work, not of reforming other Churches, but of turning their fellow-men from the error of their ways. Disparagingly, almost contemptuously, as the Patriot, in the same article, speaks of Wesleyan Ministers as theological writers, it is admitted that they are successful in the conversion of sinners. Let this remain their praise. May their glory in this respect never be dimmed! Let them prosecute their godlike work, remembering their encouragement, that while the Word of God pronounces no express benediction on that which the Patriot regards as the special "Mission of Congregationalists," it does declare that "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."—London Watchman.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Original Matter is particularly requested for this Paper such as, Local Intelligence—Biographies—Notices of the introduction, rise, and progress of Methodism in Circumstances, Revivals, and remarkable Conversations—Articles on education, temperance, literature, science, and religion—Illustrations of Providence—Sketches of Scripture characters—Interesting anecdotes—Descriptions of natural scenery—Papers on any prominent feature of Methodism, &c. &c. Articles, as a general rule, should be short and pithy; as a judicious variety in each number is the secret of newspaper popularity and usefulness.

NOTICES OF NEWFOUNDLAND.

[No. 9.] Thirty years ago the inhabitants of Newfoundland, chiefly emigrants from England and Ireland, were grossly ignorant of christianity. They had left home for the purpose of seeking wealth on a foreign shore, and, in this pursuit, the salvation of the soul was a secondary matter. The fathers of the present generation, resident on this coast, built their fishing rooms and boats, and with but few exceptions signed not for

"The sound of the church-going bell, Nor mind'd when a Sabbath appear'd." The Sabbath was not known from any other day save by a notorious degree of drunkenness and riot. Fish was caught and cured, and bought and sold as regularly on the Sabbath as on any other day. On the Sabbath was observed a day of rest from labour it was generally spent in sinful pleasures. "Before your Missionaries visited these coasts," observed a pious and intelligent fisherman to me, "it was not even safe for a young female to walk out alone on the Sabbath. I have seen the stones of that beach red with the blood of drunken men fighting on the Sabbath." Things the most horrid, have been related to me by intelligent persons, committed by the once barbarous, ignorant sons of the sea, when they moored their boats and assembled on the shore. Many of your readers, Mr. Editor, will know that Billingsgate fishmarket in London is proverbial for its low language and indecent manners. But why? Is it because the fisherman's occupation deprives him of privileges we landmen enjoy? Probably so. His turn is on the deep. His every mouthful of bread is obtained in the fierce fight of the elements of the winds and waves. "God has cast" his "bread upon the waters, and" it is indeed "after many days" of anxious toil he "finds it;" and in earning that bread, how is "the sweat of his brow" enlivened by the briny spray of ocean's waves! His occupation presents him with the fewest means of intellectual and moral improvement.

Mr. Philip Toque, the author of a little work alluded to in former Notices, who possesses an intimate and extensive knowledge of the fisheries and habits of the fishermen of the country, thus writes—"This spring (1843), in the month of March, I accompanied William Sweetland, Esq. of Bonavista, to view several ship wrecks. On the south side of Cape Bonavista, were two vessels on shore, out of one of which the men were taking the seals; and on the north side of the Cape were two more vessels; a short distance from the shore, waterlogged and abandoned. All these vessels were found in upon the land by the running ice, the crews of which were saved. I perceived that two of the vessels were lost prosecuting the seal fishery this spring, and part of several crews." "The seal fishery," Mr. Toque remarks, is not only surrounded by physical calamities, but it is a nursery for moral and spiritual evils. It has a tendency to harden the heart and render it insensible to the finer feelings of human nature. It is a constant scene of blood and slaughter. Here you behold a heap of seals which have only received a slight wound from the gun, withering, and exclaiming the "I see with their blood—rolling from side to side—in dying agonies. There you see other seals while the

last spark of life is not yet extinguished, being seized by the fish and fasten their starlings and knives and lobsters, making the imprudent fisher shrink with horror to touch them." (Lancet, 1843.)

But, desolated as the Sabbath is at present, numerous as are the moral evils which exist among us at the present day, they are but remnants of that mighty depravity which, in many fishing settlements, a generation ago, admitted of no exception of good. Many of the first visitors to these shores came only to prosecute the fishery in the summer, and returned to England in the fall. The neighbours they left behind married and brought up families destitute of the means of grace; consequently were grossly ignorant of even the form of religion, save the few ceremonies observed by their Irish Roman Catholic neighbours. While these protestants were neglected by the pastors of their own church, a Romish priest would be seen visiting annually the Irish settlers to administer the rites of their church. Popery possesses the elements of vitality and aggression, and diffuses its deadly leaven as rapidly as the holy leaven of the protestant faith. Many English families became converts to Rome. "Sure it's better to be of some religion than none," was the Irishman's first objection to the ignorant English settler. "And thin, is't our's the oldest religion in the world? Did't we build all your fine churches in old England, and read mass in them before Henry the eighth quarrelled with the Pope because his Holiness would't let him marry six wives?" was his second argument. "And it's ours be the oldest religion, isn't it the best, my jewel? And since its better to be of the best religion than of none," was the irresistible conclusion; and the untutored Englishman, with all his household, was baptized into the Romish church. Thus whole protestant communities have been tacked up in the anti-christian faith. It is said they are greatly improved by their connection with the Irish and their union with their Romish church. But as the nature of their improvement has only been described by report, you will excuse me giving you hearsay tales. Not but that I would readily acknowledge any portion of good Englishmen had obtained by their adoption of Irish habits and Irish Popery. Gross darkness I fear rests upon them. A few families better instructed have held up the light of truth and exhibit a loftier and holier religion.

In some of the most desolate places, a pious man has been found calling his family together on the Sabbath for divine worship around the family altar. The worship consisting of reading the Liturgy of the Church of England, the lessons for the day, and the collects as they are appointed in the prayer book, together with a psalm of Sternhold & Hopkins—"Old version." Such families formed a nucleus for what is now a flourishing church. They welcomed the Wesleyan Missionaries as men of God, and received their word with gladness of heart. During the visits of the first missionaries, much opposition was given by "the baser sort of people." Sometimes the Missionary was waylaid; and his life was in imminent danger from bloody men who lay in wait for him, the woods and solitary paths through which he had to pass greatly facilitating their wicked design. But God is the Missionary's shield, and gives testimony to the word of his grace by converting even the foes of the Missionary. The ministry of the first labourers roused attention. Their pious walked through and searched as with a candle the fisherman's conscience. They unbowed "the monitor within," put a rod in his hand with which it chastised the man, and in many instances drove him from his labour on the Sabbath day, and made him retire to weep and pray in secret.

In some of my missionary travels I have spent many interesting hours by the fisherman's cabin fire-side, or woodman's fire, listening to the recital of stories, current among the people, of God's judgments upon Sabbath breakers. After the evening service the people linger to sit and talk with the stranger. At these seasons not only may good be done by conversation with the poor untutored natives, but I have elicited from many a tale of wonder and of terror.—How such an one in hauling caplin on the Sabbath was alarmed to find his net full of matter worse than decomposed blubber.—How another fisherman, while fishing on the Sabbath, was suddenly lifted up out of the water both he and his boat by an invisible hand, and his boat carried to the top of a rock!—"But the dark Sunday sun," said one man, who thought me rather sceptical, "it was sudden dark at midday, and we had to light the lamps at twelve o'clock to split the fish in the fire." I remon'd or what a gift we were in when P. T. declared God had darkened the sun because we broke the Sabbath! This circumstance, which occurred many years ago, is believed by the generality of the old people, to have been sent as a judgment. It was probably an eclipse of the sun. Though God does make nature speak, An assembl'd Balaam, And to such a degree of wildness did the Jews arrive that, if the little hill from which I descended the Saviour, the stones would have been of blood. And when that guilt was consummated by the crucifixion of the Son of God, the rocks rent asunder, the sun veiled his shining face in darkness, and earth in her centre groan'd. J. B.

Tea Meeting at Shelburne. Mr. Editor.—You will be pleased to see a very interesting Tea Meeting on the 3rd inst. at Shelburne for the Wesleyan Sabbath School place. The work of such an institution has been long felt by here, and has, doubtless, contributed to retard the progress of Methodism in this locality. About two hundred persons v to partake of the good things the Ladies, to which ample justice Excellent and telling Addresses were interspersed with animation by the following gentlemen:—A. H. Cocken, Esq., presided on the occasion—Peter Esq.—Charles Owen, Esq.—an Wm. Wilson. A vote of than sent to the Ladies interested in the hospitalities, for the gratifying interest on the occasion. The counting of Episcopals, Presbyterians, and Methodists, were ap lighted with all the exercises of This was the first Meeting ever held in Shelburne, and a of piety I scarcely ever witness which marked the Speeches. A gas feeling pervaded the meeting, and the result of this first effort; which in useful books, will lay the f a Sabbath School Library which creased, will prove a lasting b children and parents. R. I Shelburne, October 6th, 1849.

For the Tea Meeting at Walla Rev. and Dear Sir,—According Notice," a Tea-Meeting, our new Church now nearly co held at Wallace Harbour on W 10th inst. About 225 persons 4 o'clock to a most splendid g gratuitously by eleven Ladies, w much skill and taste in the o rangement of their Tables; and tie were not done by those wh the native board, to what was t tlem, it was not the fault of I After these preliminaries, w to individual satisfaction, and t &c. were removed,—Joseph O River Philip was called to the is a brief speech, addressed the good effect. He then called up ing gentlemen, Jay and Jos dress the Meeting,—viz., Jos Esq., S. Fulton, Esq. M. P. Esq., Rev. J. Narraway, Mr. and Rev. W. C. Beals. Inter between the speeches were o music. A vote of thanks was Ladies, who sat Tables, and Chairman for his kindness in g the Meeting. The company b o'clock, highly gratified with t tertainment of the evening. of the Meeting amounted to t sum of £11 11 S, which, as t est, will be expended on the Church, which will be com course of six or eight weeks. W. S. Wallace, Oct. 16th, 1849.

Charge of Wesleyan Proselyti Rev. and Dear Brother,— trace the present opportunity o for your able and Christian-l Wesleyan Methodism against and unprovoked attack of the F fan Church in this Province. o our Body by the Organ or Rep the Free Church of Scotland it is certainly most ungrateful o was stationed at Halifax wher putation of Ministers from that ed there. The Kirk Ministe did not deem it advisable to all tlemen to occupy their places o plication was made to us for i Chapels, and I am happy to Trustees and myself, in acco spirit of our holy religion, and ted by our Fathers and Brethr their country, most cheerfull free use of our premises for t their cause. I mention this c contrast the treatment of Meth them, with that which we are at their hands. It is rather amusing to hear men charging the Wesleyan the sin of Proselytism. What and object of their Mission to We had previously three o f sons of Presbyterians in this a College or Academy for train