

describe a gospel of the independence of Christians one of another? Why, it is the total opposite of every New Testament page—a gospel of separation! Why, listen:—‘By love serve one another.’ ‘For we are members one of another.’ ‘If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.’ ‘Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you.’ ‘Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.’

The founder of Independency or Congregationalism was Robert Browne, a clergyman of the Church in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and his followers were first known as Brownists. It was about the year 1570 that he began to preach his novel doctrine. He denounced all who were content to remain in a Church the ceremonial and laws of which they did not approve. The tone and temper of his mind may be gathered from a tract that he wrote, entitled ‘On Reformation without tarrying for any.’ So small was his success at the first, and so little was the encouragement he received, that he passed over into Holland. In Holland he found a more congenial soil for his teaching than in England. Even there, however, his principles brought confusion and disorder, so he retired into Scotland, and at a later period he was solemnly excommunicated at Northampton by the bishop of the diocese. Browne ultimately saw the foolishness of the principles he had advocated, and made his peace with the Church. He was presented to an incumbency, and died at an advanced age in the year 1630.

It is only right to add that the Presbyterians no less than the Churchmen of his day disapproved of Browne’s doctrine of Independency. The Puritan party was mainly Presbyterian, and their one idea was to Calvinise the Church of England—to set up a Presbyterian Church Establishment in the place of the old Church of the land. ‘I abhor,’ says Baxter in the seventeenth century, ‘unlimited liberty and toleration of all, and think myself able to prove the

wickedness of it.’ Indeed, that each congregation should form a religious Republic was certainly not the desire of the great Puritan party, and the feeling against religion in some form established had no place in their breasts.

And, lastly, what of this principle of Independency in our own day? It is, as might be expected, breaking down. The establishment of a Congregational Union by the Congregationalists themselves is a confession that it has not answered—that Christian congregations do need binding together—that there must be a sense of oneness. The whole tide is setting once more in favour of unity. There is a re-awakening of brotherly love and Christian charity. Rivalries and jealousies have had their day, and the whisper is becoming something more than a whisper, ‘Sirs, ye are brethren: why do ye wrong one to another?’

At whose door the rise of these various sects lies we do not care to stay to inquire. ‘Let the dead bury their dead.’ All parties were no doubt at fault—the Church in her lack of sympathy; those who separated from her in their hastiness and self-will. Results outlast causes; and the evils of division which we have amongst us still are the fruit of days long gone by. That there is need for their further continuance no thoughtful person will seriously maintain. With a little sacrifice, a little charity, a little humility, we might all be one to-morrow, one as we were in the days of old, one as the Lord willed us to be.

Yes, one! For the foes of Christianity are marshalling their forces and preparing for battle. They do not conceal their designs. What are they telling us? They tell us that all forms of Christianity are equally hateful to them—equally pernicious. Romanists, Protestants, Churchmen, equally they desire to exterminate. ‘Free license for immorality,’ says one of their papers lying before me, ‘is the substance of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism alike.’ Again, with regard to religious education, what can be plainer than this? ‘The unsectarian dodge is