

WE have received from a respected brother, whose face in the flesh we have never seen, but with whom we have often had sweet converse, some private letters. The substance thereof we feel to be so suggestive, that we take the liberty of printing a large part of the letters, assured that others will enjoy the same even should they not entirely accept the utterances:

"I went to Halifax at the end of the year for medical advice. There I heard that the old Congregational church, "Salem," in Argyle street, had been lately sold and was to be turned into shops. Oh! other people may take these things easily, but they do distress me. Does humanity love pomp and parade and bustle and noise? so that anything that is merely pure and spiritual has no attraction for human nature. At this moment, the "Salvation Army" is working, and with success, in Halifax.

And the Congregational church has died out there!

There is organization (and there is mutual forbearance, and there is a sweet *follow-feeling* which is even better than *esprit de corps*) in the Salvation Army: but there is (to my mind) a very sensuous shell which covers the spiritual kernel of the Christian life and work. Drums and tambourines, at first sight, seem to be rowdy accompaniments of the gospel, but they do attract attention. Does God sanction them? On the other hand, how is it that Congregational principle does not last? Is it a kernel *without any shell* to protect it? And does it lapse into spiritualism? which is unsuitable for humanity, and so does it evanesce?

My three R's (without invasion of orthography) are Reason, Revelation and Regeneration. Now revelation is addressed to *reason*, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost comes *through* "Revelation."

"The seed is the Word of God,

The sword of *The Spirit* is the Word of God."

Therefore in the spread of the kingdom, reason cannot be discarded. Our reasoning may be faulty, may be erroneous, but the national faculty itself is that to which the utterance of God is addressed. And the Spirit of God to regenerate is conveyed *in and through* that revelation, or utterance of His to the rational creature. Otherwise, obedience, to such a precept: "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's," would be simply impossible. And God would have spoken to no purpose. In His very insistence on the necessity of the new birth of this very "regeneration," our Lord refers to reason when he says: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." He refers to a great natural and spiritual law, that "like begets like." Nothing but reason can take cognizance of that law. And nothing but reason can respond to the requirement—"Ye *why even of yourselves* judge ye not what is right?"

In the little magazine of the 15th Feb., I have been much struck by Mr. Hague's letter, (or paper,) on "organization or non-organization." It is a two edged sword. It declares the utter insufficiency of Congregational principles by themselves. But does it not also show the necessity for orthodox "organization?"

What is "organization" but practical concord in a

single purpose? This is the very ground on which I find, when I search my conscience, that I am not an "Independent." The essential FREEDOM (Galatians, v, 1,) of Congregationalism for the sake of holiness, and in order to holiness *in single devotion to Christ*, is the very thing that demands submission to fixed settled truth. "No uncertain sound of Biblical doctrine" can consist with "orthodoxy"; no uncertain sound of the trumpet can awaken dead souls; no uncertain sound of the bugle can call the soldiers of Christ together to fight under his banner. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking IN TRUTH." "Independence like Pilate is always asking, "What is truth?" whereas the Saviour said that He, "came to be a witness to the truth," and that "every one that is of the truth heareth thy voice." It is death to "Congregational" principle if it ignores "authority." Our life requires that we should decline *human* authority in order that we should give ourselves up to Divine authority. Authoritative Biblical Congregationalism is *authoritative Biblical Christianity*. And of this, in its differentia, it is plain from Mr. Hague's letter that the churches are not always the *best* judges.

Do you suppose, if three TRUE ministers of Christ had listened continuously to the teaching of the faulty pastors, that they, in whom God had "put the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinth. v, end of verse 19,) would not have detected the unsoundness and the absence of "grace?" (See Acts xi, 23, and Galatians ii, 9.) It is quite true that the final acceptance of pastors ought to rest with the "churches of the saints," that is with the real believers in the several congregations, but then it is equally true that qualified and faithful ministers of Christ, who are given up to the same function, would *much* sooner detect "the spirit of error" and the departure from "the narrow gate in the trodden way" than do the congregations detect it.

Are such men as Mr. Hague alludes to to be allowed to waste the flock because independency refuses guidance *ab extra*? The truth is, that the time has come when we must choose between "Independency" and holy Congregationalism. "True holiness," in Ephesians is "holiness of the truth."

If we but lived as we ought to live and as we might live, a power would go out from us that would make every day a lyric sermon that should be seen and felt by an ever-enlarging audience.

Mr. Ruskin gives this timely truth; "The true strength of every human soul is to be depended on as many nobler as it can discern, and to be depended upon by as many inferior as it can reach."

The man who is over-slow to praise any one will live a long time before his silence in this respect can have done as much harm as a person who is too lavish and careless with his eulogies may do in a day.

We know well what is implied by a reserve fund of money or of time over the actual needs of our daily life, how it can be applied to a hundred objects of comfort and pleasure to families, or of welfare to the community. But it rarely occurs to us that the same thing applies in even a more effective and permanent manner to our vital powers. To have a surplus of strength is at once to have many opportunities put into our hands; and he, who by a systematic self care, maintains this surplus is in just that proportion prepared to be helpful and valuable to society.