

England, so dear to us still. Rival sects there were none. Dissent was a term unknown. Every man who was a Christian was, as a matter of course, a Churchman. And the people of those early days would have been not a little surprised had they been told that everyone might worship Christ just as he liked, in his own way—that there was no visible Church in which His Presence was felt and His Spirit moved.

Where, then, did the numberless sects of to-day spring from? What is their origin? They sprang, alas! in the first instance, from the Church, and had their origin in the storms and troubles of the Reformation. Think of it, you who never cross the Church's threshold or enter her sacred precincts. Your forefathers worshipped at her altars and subscribed to her Creed. They received help and consolation in their pilgrimage from the prayers we still repeat. They died in the faith of the Church, and they sleep their last sleep beneath the shelter of her walls. Never say you have no concern in the old Church of England. Why, she is the cradle of the best instincts of your race, and whatever religion you now have is a fragment torn from her teaching!

It was fifteen hundred years after Christ when modern Dissent first saw the light. And the first body of modern Dissenters were those who are still known as Independents or Congregationalists. The principle of Congregationalism is, briefly, that each congregation of Christian people is a Church to itself. The first rule of the Congregational Union of England and Wales recognises 'as the distinctive principle of Congregational Churches the Scriptural right of every separate Church to maintain perfect independence in the government and administration of its own affairs.' And we are told elsewhere that this means that 'a Church (*i.e.* a congregation) is complete in itself; and that all questions of faith, discipline, and membership are to be settled by its members.'

Such principles as these are, of course, not at all in harmony with those we have been advocating. Instead of speaking of

one society or kingdom of Christ upon earth as being in accordance with His Mind, we must, if we accept them, say that His idea was a multitude of wholly independent bodies, each acting in the way it chooses. Instead of one army of many battalions marching against a common foe we must picture multitudes of small companies skirmishing and sallying forth on their own account, and without reference to the exploits of their neighbours. Then, too, we must say that the people of Antioch showed culpable weakness in accepting the decree of the Council of Jerusalem. They should have sent back the disciples when they came, telling them they could acknowledge no external authority—that the question must be settled among and by themselves. St. Paul, also, was violating this principle when he wrote to Titus in Crete 'to ordain elders in every city,' 'to set things in order,' and 'to exhort and rebuke with all authority,' in fact, to superintend all the congregations in the island; or, again, when he wrote to Timothy similar directions about the oversight of the elders and congregations in and around Ephesus. For each separate congregation, on the principle of the Independents, should have resented such interference as being contrary to the Will of Christ.

But, still further, we must be prepared to abandon some of the most beautiful of New Testament imagery as mere vague phrases having no real practical meaning. When our Lord speaks of the Vine and its branches, of the one Flock under the One Shepherd, of the Kingdom with its subjects living under the equal laws of a much-loved King, we must suppose that He has no thought of our relation to one another, but only to Himself.

When S. Paul speaks of Christians forming the Spiritual Body of Christ, of the members acting in concert together, rejoicing and sorrowing together, united as are the members of the human frame—still we must be careful to recollect that he is only referring to some invisible Church, of which, indeed, he tells us little.

Oh! dear friend, how can I continue to