

prove the spiritual unity of believers, by admitting brethren from other churches into a participation of our special services, although generally accepted, has not always been reciprocated. It is, to say the least, possible that this desire to show our superiority to sectarian narrowness may have been sometimes misunderstood ; and that it may have been regarded more as an indication of our want of denominational cohesion, or of local feebleness, than of enlarged catholicity. We cannot fail to perceive that the stronger churches around us are adopting a different policy. Their platforms are manned by their own adherents, their ordination services are conducted by their own ministers. Far be it from us to advocate the adoption of any course which would involve us in the meshes of churchly exclusiveness, or which would prevent the cordial expression of fraternal willingness ; but it is worthy of consideration whether it would not promote our self-respect, our efficiency and our moral influence were we to lay under contribution, more frequently than we do, the services of our *own* brethren in our special work.

Whilst some religious bodies have held up their peculiarities, and emphasized their differences, Congregationalists have usually put stress on the grand cardinal elements of the common faith. This, doubtless, is the more amiable, and perhaps the more Christian method ; but it has nevertheless done much to make others feel as if we had no distinctive principles of much importance to advocate, and to make them come to regard us as Christian people, somewhat spiritual, but withal shapeless and ill-defined, much in need of their more angular theologies, their centrepieces and their better ordered polities. Indeed, it would appear that the practice referred to has reacted very strongly and very practically on ourselves. Our people have been so impressed with the many points of concord between their own churches and other denominations, and are so reluctant to study the contradistinctive principles, which were wont to be regarded by our predecessors as so sacred, that many of them retain their hold with a feeble hand, and are ready, when the hour of trial comes, to forsake their former moorings. It is, moreover, the studied policy of certain churches to dwell on the points of agreement ; to see no obstacles in the way of actual incorporation, provided always, *our people* are willing to become incorporated.

They would start no difficulties to their reception, indeed would be quite willing to receive them as actual partakers of their inheritance, and full participants of all their rights and privileges ; would, besides, assign them special posts of honour, if they would only lay aside their slight peculiarities, and trifling scruples of conscience, and assume the new family name. So smooth has the road been made, so attractive the proffered home, that not only private members, and ministers of immature experience, but veterans, grey in the service, have changed their ecclesiastical relationship ; not because they had changed their views, but merely to obtain more desirable fields of labour. The transition in their opinion is so slight that conscience has given them no trouble, and the sacred associations of a lifetime have been sacrificed to worldly gain. Every man who, through the force of conviction, is led to alter his church relation, at any age or under any circumstances, deserves respect and honour ; but it is far different with those who, like Esau, for the sake of a mess of pottage, will sell their birthright. It is high time that as churches, and especially as ministers of Christ, we should try our principles by the crucial test of Holy Scripture ; and while cherishing love, unfeigned and pure, to all who love the Lord Jesus ; while giving every man the free and heaven-chartered privilege of thinking for himself, to maintain with boldness the distinctive features of our body ; and to make all men know that we have principles to uphold, authoritative because divine ; and all-important, because needful to the highest form of Christian manhood, and to the spread of spiritual Christianity.

In the direct work of evangelization, our missionary operations claim special attention. During the infancy of most of our churches, help from without is almost invariably indispensable, in administering which great care is requisite.