

a particular church or congregation of believers statedly meeting in one place. A provincial or national church including many particular churches, and governed by general officers, has no place in the Congregational system. "The plan pursued by the apostles seems to have been," says Archbishop Whately, "to establish a great number of small (in comparison with most modern churches) distinct and *independent* communities...occasionally conferring with the brethren in other churches, but owning no submission to the rulers of any other church, or to any central common authority, except to the apostles themselves,"* whose office was extraordinary, and but for a limited time.

This may be confirmed by an appeal to the New Testament. Look to the superscription of the epistle to the church of Corinth. Corinth was in the province of Achaia. In that province there were other churches besides that in the city of Corinth. If, then, a provincial church had existed, the epistle would have been addressed to the church of Achaia. But, in truth, the independence of the church at Cenchrea, the port of Corinth, and but a few miles distant from that city, is distinctly recognised by the apostle, Rom. xvi. 1. He also speaks of "the churches of Galatia," Gal. i. 2: "the churches of God in Judea," 1 Thes. ii. 14; and John speaks of "the seven churches which are in Asia," Rev. i. 11.

Church history fully sustains these interpretations. Mosheim, in his commentaries on the affairs of the Christians, says, "Although all the churches were, in the first age of Christianity, united together in one common bond of faith and love, and were in every respect ready to promote the interests and welfare of each other by a reciprocal interchange of good offices, yet with regard to government and internal economy, every individual church considered itself as an independent community, none of them ever looking in these respects, beyond the circle of its own members for assistance, or recognising any sort of external influence or authority. Neither in the New Testament, nor in any ancient document whatever, do we find anything recorded from whence it might be inferred that any of the minor churches were at all dependent on, or looked up for direction to, those of greater magnitude or consequence: on the contrary, several things occur therein which put it out of all doubt that every one of them enjoyed the same rights, and was considered as being on a footing of the most perfect equality with the rest."† "The passages already alleged sufficiently prove," says Bishop Kay, "that in Tertullian's estimation all the apostolic churches were independent of each other, and equal in rank and authority."‡

Gibbon has truly said, "The (Christian) societies which were instituted in the cities of the Roman empire were united only by the ties of faith and charity. *Independence and equality* formed the basis of their internal constitution. * * * Every society formed within itself a separate and independent republic; and although the most distant of these little states maintained a mutual as well as friendly intercourse of letters and deputations, the Christian world was not yet connected by any supreme authority or legislative assembly."||

* Essays on the Kingdom of Christ, ii. § 20, p. 129.

† Vol. i. cent. i. § 48.

‡ Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries, p. 236.

|| Decline and Fall, chap. xv.