

time when the church lived mainly within herself, and fought and suffered to live, and those of this aggressive era when she goes forth into all the world, and preaches the Gospel to every creature; a book that will not degrade religion by offences against grammar, common sense, and good taste, yet not be polished too smoothly by hyper-fastidiousness; that will be informed in every part by those great truths of God's word which are both "milk for babes," and "strong meat for those that are of full age," but still be a book of spiritual songs; that will be, in fine, so rich and full, and of such substantial worth, that from generation to generation we shall desire no change. If there is such a book in the world, let us have it.

OUR CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP.

I come now to a less pleasing subject, which, however, lies directly in my path. At different periods, we have been compelled, but you will all bear witness how reluctantly, to take up the cases of certain members of the Union, against whom charges have been brought, which, if substantiated, would have disqualified them for any further connection with us. Such proceedings are always painful, from their very nature, to those who regard the honour of every one that bears the name of Christ. They consume much precious time. They are rarely disposed of with unanimity. They are not regularly provided for, though implied to be possible, in our rules, and it would be very difficult to make provisions covering circumstances so diverse. Nor do our conclusions carry any binding force. After our most careful investigations, a church or minister disowned by this body may be recognised, and *vice versa*, by any member of it; while in cases where unanimous action can be taken, our joint declaration of belief in the innocence of guilt of the party accused may add little to the sense of the same entertained by our members individually.

For several years past these considerations have pressed upon my own attention the question, whether some modification of the basis of the Union be not possible, which would exclude all such questions. But can we abolish all qualifications for membership, and say that any minister or any church claiming the name "Congregational" is to be received without further inquiry as to their faith or works? Is Congregationalism a system of Church polity only? Does it not include Christian doctrine and Christian life? There are Unitarian and Universalist churches by scores, with this form of government, who have elsewhere contended eagerly for recognition by the orthodox. Ought we to receive such? But how could we say nay, if we have no test for admission? There are bad or doubtful men in the ministry, who have much denominational feeling, and who would gladly acquire some respectability by coming under our wing: shall they have it? Do not all the purposes for which we combine pre-suppose our having confidence in each other? Would there not be an end to our brotherly fellowship, unless we excluded the unworthy? Are we not in great measure responsible for each other before them which are without?

Such are the difficulties that have confronted me, when trying to hit upon some plan for saving ourselves the labour and the pain of taking up charges brought against our members. It seems clear to my own mind that we must either admit all and sundry, or that we must shoulder the responsibility of these investigations. "It must needs be that offences come," and if a member of this body apostatises from the faith, or in works denies the Lord, we *cannot help* dealing with the matter. But we deal with it only in so far as membership in this body is concerned. We have no right, and I have seen no inclination, to go beyond this point. If a minister, for instance, proves unworthy, and we exclude him from the Union, there is an end of the matter, in this body. We do not go to the church which he may be serving and say, "you shall not have this man to be Pastor." We say, "We, as a Union, will not recognise him." In doing this, we only exercise the right which every society, and every individual man possesses, of choosing our own associates. I must confess that I have no sympathy with the disposition sometimes apparent, to represent all such action as an interference with church-independence, or a violation of our own constitution, Art. III. It seems to me that a very one-sided independency would result from a looser system. The independence of every