

to preach. But nearly all refused to "fellowship" him. He was not permitted to preach in their churches. To them the decision of the council was law, though it uttered nothing authoritative. That council only said, "We have examined the case, and are satisfied that he is not a suitable person to preach the gospel. We shall not fellowship him, and we advise others to take the same course." No compulsion was used. Not a word of authority was uttered. Yet such is the respect paid to councils, that their influence in church matters is much greater than that of civil courts.

6. If the pastor is installed over a church by the aid of a council, there are special reasons for *dissolving* that pastoral relation in the same way; for it would be *uncourteous* to do otherwise. Besides, the impression would be, that there was something wrong on the part of the pastor, which led to his leaving abruptly,—or on the part of the church left, something blameworthy, concerning which they did not wish to ask advice, or which they did not choose to make public. Such an act could not fail of weakening the confidence of sister churches in that pastor, or in the church, or in both. Laws of courtesy should prevent such acts of dismissal where neighbouring pastors and churches united in the installation.

In a council called by the church and duly organized, there can be nothing hidden or clandestine. Its meetings are open and public; and though purely advisory, it has great influence in and beyond that church. It is an appeal to the public for the wisdom, justice and truthfulness of their acts. And public opinion is a strong agency—a powerful ally.

I repeat, the calling of a council in forming and dissolving the pastoral relation is eminently Congregational. The pastor should claim it as well as the churches. A few years ago, Rev. Mr. S was preaching in the town of B., Vt. He was a popular preacher; his influence was great, and his prospects of usefulness full of hope. But it began to be rumored that he was unsound on vital points of doctrine. The church could not agree on the question of inviting him to become their pastor. A council was called. The case demanded a large one. Ministers and churches from the surrounding country were invited; also the presidents and professors from both Middlebury and Burlington Colleges. After a careful searching and prayerful examination, he was found to be *all right*—sound in doctrine, and in church polity purely Congregational. From that time the confidence of the people was restored—confidence in the man and in his ministry, such as they could not have enjoyed but for that council. This fact illustrates what may often occur, and the benefit of councils. While they aid the worthy, they help to keep the unworthy and those who teach error from our churches. They preserve in greater purity the faith, and define more clearly the old landmarks of the Puritan fathers. These occasional public meetings in council, with a distinct object before intelligent, cultivated, Christian minds, tend to promote harmony of belief and mutual progression of views in our churches. It is a fact, that these public services have an educating influence on the lay delegates, and on the church and congregation in attendance.

We admit that the gathering of councils costs time and money; but the advantages are a full compensation.

The examination of the pastor-elect *may* be conducted in a way that shall confuse the candidate, and place him in an unjust and unfavorable light before the church and people. Such evils do occur—evils that can and should be guarded against with wisdom, careful study, and a high regard for the reputation and success of the pastor, the purity of the church, and the glory of God.

Eaton, P. Q., April 14, 1868.

E. J. S.