

admitted to communion in the assemblies of their brethren. The primitive churches sent Christian salutations and letters of instruction and warning one to another. They also sent messengers one to another, and administered relief to each other in distress. They cheerfully bore one another's burdens, and in cases of doubt and difficulty, looked to each other for advice.

This intimate and holy fellowship of churches is no more inconsistent with their independence than the friendly intercourse of neighbours is inconsistent with their being, each and all of them, independent citizens. I have no right, as an individual, to exercise authority over my neighbour, nor he over me; still it is proper that we should maintain a mutual friendly intercourse, and perform towards each other all the offices of neighbourhood and kindness.

The independence of the churches, in the sense explained, began to be invaded about the middle of the second century, by the establishment of Synods with legislative and dictatorial powers.\* It continued to be invaded more and more, till at length it utterly disappeared from the Church. And when this was gone, there was no let or hindrance to the progress of usurpation, until all the churches became merged in one universal church, and all power was concentrated in the lordly Bishop of Rome.

The independence of particular churches, modified by established forms of ecclesiastical intercourse and fellowship, constitutes the peculiar characteristic and glory of Congregationalism. In the government of many denominations of Christians, indeed, the most of them,—this independence is taken away; or, rather it has never yet been restored. The particular churches are all merged in a general church, and are subject to a jurisdiction above and without themselves. But not so in the Congregational churches. All power here originates, under Christ, in the Church, and terminates in the church. There may be church conferences and Synods and ministerial associations, for mutual encouragement, edification, and prayer. Councils may be called, and may give advice; but this advice may be accepted or rejected. To be sure, where the advice of a council is rejected, there may follow, for a time, and there has followed, a breach of fellowship; but such breaches of fellowship have usually resulted rather from misapprehension, or a want of brotherly love, than from any inherent defect of ecclesiastical organization. Of course, the proper remedy for them is to be sought in a better understanding of our peculiar principles, and in an increase of the spirit of love, and not in a departure from that form of church government which we believe to have been sanctioned by Christ and His apostles.

#### RANDOM APPEALS TO SCRIPTURE.

This is a practice that is becoming too common, not only by Christians but by ministers. The more startling or strange the application of the admonition or the promise the stronger the desire to give it publicity. In determining duty in the individual Christian life great stress is laid upon the casual presentation of passages of Scripture. Their seasonable occurrence to the eye or the mind is commonly supposed to prove that it is immediately from God, and without hesitation the man determines as to the state of his soul or the path of duty. Then great publicity is given to the fact and how the passage operated to the removal of his distress or the solution of his doubt.

Yet, it must be confessed the practice is perilous. All Scripture is no doubt true in itself, but many parts may be erroneous in their application to the present state of the individual. Jonah probably was encouraged when he came to the seaside to find a ship just

\* "These Synods or Councils," says Mosheim, "of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of the second century, changed the whole face of the Church, and gave it a new form; for by them the ancient privileges of the people were diminished, and the power and authority of the bishops greatly augmented." There could have been no danger in these Synods, and might have been much benefit, if they had confined themselves to *deliberation and counsel*, "but they soon turned their influence into *dominion*, and their councils into *laws*, and asserted that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people *authoritative rules of faith and practice*."—*Eu. Hist. Cent. ii., Part 2, Chap. ii.*

ready to sail, and perhaps Judas was strengthened in his purpose to betray his Master by the command, "What thou doest do quickly." The angel of the Lord commissioned Gideon to go and deliver Israel as he was threshing wheat. A man engaged in the same work feels an inclination to go forth and preach, but has some doubt as to his sufficiency and success, when lo, these words come to his mind, "Arise, for the Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour," and his doubts are scattered like chaff before the wind.

We have heard of a pious woman who had received proposals of marriage from an eligible suitor but had some conflict between inclination and duty because he was not a Christian; but her mind was determined and set at ease by opening the Bible, and casting her eye on the admonition, "Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with the men, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." We have read of a good old man who used to exhort people to live by the Ten Commandments, and not by impulses; and he used to tell how he got free from the delusion himself. When he was a lad he was poor and pious, and thought that all suggestions in Scriptural style came from heaven. Walking one day by a neighbour's hedge, and in his need wishing some of it to burn, instantly the word came, "In all this job sinned not," and in faith of this he began to make free with his neighbour's wood. Happily the command, "Thou shalt not steal," remedied the application of the text and revealed his error, or, as the ingenuous relator remarks, the Word of God might have led him out of the church into the jail.

But all this is noticing the danger on only one side, though it is by far the most common side. The Word of God has its threatenings and denunciations, and there are persons of melancholy temperament and given to dejection. They are prone to look on the dark side, what wonder, then, when a threatening of Scripture strikes the mind in such a case, if the man, viewing it as a divine intimation, is plunged into distraction or despair.

We cannot love the Word of God too much or consult it too often. But we are to "search the Scriptures," and it is "to dwell in us richly in *all wisdom*." It is true also that it is the only infallible rule of *practice* as well as of faith; that it was intended not only to make us "wise unto salvation," but to furnish us thoroughly "unto all good works." But we are not to turn it into a kind of a lottery, or to use it as a spell, or a charm. We are to "understand what we read." We are not to take it separately but connectedly; and if we would be directed by it as to our duty, or satisfied by it as to our state, we are to peruse it with diligence, humility, and prayer; to observe the passages that refer to persons of our character and condition, that describe the temptations to which we are exposed, or the trials under which we labour. Thus, and thus only, will we find it "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path," lending us the most appropriate assistance under all circumstances and subserving "all things that pertain to life and godliness."—*Christian Weekly*.

#### SPIRIT OF CHINESE CONVERTS.

Many who have some knowledge of missionary statistics have, doubtless, often wondered what sort of Christians the figures for communicants represent. Are Christians won from heathenism earnest, faithful, spiritual Christians, such as are found in the churches at home? At the London Conference on Missions the Rev. W. Fleming Stevenson answered this question, so far as China is concerned, from observations made by himself. He first showed how little Chinamen can gain by becoming Christians. At best, if they become helpers, they can only receive a very small salary, hardly sufficient to keep them alive; while, on the other hand, they lose the companionship of their friends and become outcasts, and have difficulties in their business which they never had before. In a worldly point of view they are losers, rather than gainers, in becoming Christians. But, says Mr. Stevenson, they take all this joyfully, and freely hazard their lives for the Gospel. "They can cut off our heads," remarked some Chinese Christians to Mr. Stevenson; "but they cannot behead Christ."

There are many noble women among the converts. One who went to a missionary hospital became a convert while an inmate. When she left, she found her husband's home closed to her. For some years she was shut out; but she did not despair nor give up her religion. Finally she induced her husband to accept the gospel, then her son, and others of her relatives, until eleven in all were converted. In conclusion, Mr. Stevenson says:

"I have found nowhere in Christian lands men and women of a higher type than I met in China—of a finer spiritual experience, of a higher spiritual tone, or of nobler spiritual life. Where missions show such fruit, they are beyond the impeachment of producing shallow and transitory impressions; and I came away with the conviction that there are in the native churches in China not only the elements of stability, but of that steadfast and irresistible revolution that will carry over the whole empire to the new faith."

#### DR. CHALMERS.

Chalmers was Principal of the University and Professor of Theology and Divinity proper. He was also royal chaplain for Scotland, and subject to the order of the Queen to preach at any time or place that the royal will might determine. He was the Jupiter Tonans of Scotland at that time, and the Magnus Apollo of the evangelical party for over a quarter of a century. He at once moulded and led the best minds of Scotland. The country was ripe for such a movement as the Disruption of 1843, and that condition of public sentiment in the nation and in the Church of John Knox was the direct result of Chalmers' teaching, alike in the rostrum and the pulpit. When he preached he preached like an angel from heaven. When he lectured to his students he always spoke as a man who was groping his way into the hearts as well as the heads of his hearers. His views had so thoroughly permeated the whole country that the Honourable Fox Maule (afterward Lord Panmure) in the House of Commons, warned the nobles of England against a measure which might result in the disruption of the National Church of Scotland, using these words: "I tell England, and I tell the civilized world, that if this Parliament shall hazard a disruption in our national Kirk, nine-tenths of the intelligence and piety will go out of the Church, simply because it is the movement of Thomas Chalmers;" and Lord Panmure's prediction was verified by the Disruption of 1843.

In the rostrum, as in the pulpit, Chalmers read closely. His manner was rather awkward, his dialect very broad Fifehire, and his voice by no means sweet or well toned, yet not harsh nor disagreeable. His eye was mellow, yet the very symbol of earnestness, purity and sincerity. When he became intensely interested in his topic or theme, his eye was the most expressive and overpowering organ of his whole head. It looked as though his brain was on fire, and his soul—his whole soul—aglow. As he swung back and forward in the rostrum, and the big thoughts rolled out of his great soul, the one hundred and thirty-four students who sat at his feet, and fifty or sixty amateur students in the gallery, were at times electrified. Old hoary-headed scholars and sages would look down from the gallery, and the embryo divines of Scotland and Ireland would look up—while both would feel literally spellbound by some of his magic sentences. The pens of the students would unconsciously fall on their note books, and after one of Chalmers' avalanches of thought, there would be a moment's pause, a still, breathless silence in the class room, then an audible utterance almost unconscious, but always earnest and unafected, of approbation.—*Dr. R. Irvine, in Sunday Magazine*.

#### A SERMON FROM A PAIR OF BOOTS.

There lived forty years ago, in Berlin, a shoemaker who had a habit of speaking harshly of all his neighbours who did not feel exactly as he did about religion. The old pastor of the parish in which the shoemaker lived heard of this, and felt that he must give him a lesson.

He did it in this way. He sent for the shoemaker