

our Church by our conformity to the Scripture model of Church government, and exhibit the Ephesian elders as the warrant of our genuineness—nay, more, we are in the same condemnation when we hold up the Westminster Confession as our distinguishing banner, and show its perfect harmony with Scripture. The original form of government and the correct creed may be maintained by a perverted Church. They may form a shell around a worm-eaten kernel. It were better to belong to a Church that has a novel form of government and a defective creed, but which maintains a spiritual life in Christ, than to belong to a Church with an apostolic system and a perfect creed, which has lost the spirit of our Lord. We hold that Churches have gone astray and have made moral shipwreck by emphasizing the external signs. Even so far has this error led, that in some cases it has set Antichrist on the throne of Christ, as Head of the Church. The danger has beset the Reformed Churches, which were formed in a spiritual revolt from the carnal grossness of a corrupt organization. Strength was sought, not in the Spirit, but in human government—in ecclesiastical law, in vigorous uniformity. Shibboleth separated Christians, and each party built up a carnal wall to protect the spiritual treasure. The old error had its old result. Cold, dead Churches were multiplied under orthodox flags, and the world looked on and could not see the difference between Zion and any other hill. The Reformed Church had a *name* to live and was dead. Antichrist was present in making human authority the ultimate arbiter of the Church's life. The true Church in all this time was to be found to human eyes in a fragmentary condition, hidden in corners, where they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.

And still further:

No cast-iron system of external government was ever given the Church by Christ or His apostles. That there should be a government is clear, and that this government (outside of all miraculous gifts) should be twofold, having pastoral oversight and a didactic function, is also clear. But beyond this the New Testament gives no prescription. This simple and elastic organization is all that the Church has derived from its Head. All the rest is human, right or wrong, according as the Holy Spirit has instructed the human mind. We may be quite sure that complicated organizations and hierarchies are utterly subversive of the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ.

Every true Christian will be more concerned with the truthfulness of these utterances than with the question whether they are the distinctive principles of a denomination. Notwithstanding, it must be a matter of no small satisfaction for him to know, should that knowledge be competent to him, that the denomination where he has found a home acknowledges such to be in very truth its avowed distinctive platform; and that such is the fact with regard to *true* Congregationalism, every student of history must be constrained to confess. There need be no desire on the part of those who bear the name Congregational or Independent to evade the knowledge of the fact that in reformation days the Independent movement found its first embodiment in the teachings of Robert Browne, for the truth depends not upon the character

of its advocates but upon its own inherent worth for acceptance, and the following extract from a tract of his will render manifest that these principles claimed by Dr. Crosby for Presbyterianism were the very ones on which those early "sectaries" separated from the Church as by law established that they might enjoy those true marks of a Christian Church. Thus writes Robert Browne of why his company was gathered at Norwich:—

"Where open wickedness is incurable, and popish prelates do reign, upholding the same, there is not the Church and kingdom of God. If there be idle shepherds, popish prelates and hireling preachers that uphold Anti-Christian abominations, there God doth not reign in His kingdom, neither are they His Church, neither is there His word of message. If open wickedness must needs be suffered, it is suffered in those which are without, as Paul saith. 1 Cor. v. 12. 'Every Christian having faith and knowledge, and speaking the word of God unto others, might win others.' 'For where one or two are gathered in My name,' saith Christ, 'there am I in the midst of them; and, if two shall agree in earth upon anything, whatsoever they desire shall be given them of the Father.' Who, therefore, can doubt but that one or two may win others to the Lord, and, praying also for the faith of those whom they teach, even faith may be given them of the Lord?"

Where, it is to be noted, Church polity is virtually presented as a realization of Christ's presence, a separation from iniquity and lies, and the liberty to speak and pray in Christ's name:—or, above all this, as the Scripture writes, Col. ii. 19, "Holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God;" or, still more emphatically, in those well-known, but too little pondered, words of the Saviour, John xv. 1-8.

And there is truly no other ground on which a Church or denomination can rightly build than that which is here set forth. Polity is important, creed still more so, but neither nor both form the true marks of a Church of Christ. His kingdom is not to be seen by observing external signs, save as they are manifestations of the saving life within. This understood, what are the living witnesses of true Church life? As the Spirit is confessedly