

that of Congregational Independency, there was a distinctive difference between it and the Independency that was known in England in Reformation times, and that found a place in Scotland at a later period. The difference consisted in the conception of the nature of a church or "kirk" of Christ by Knox and his successors on the one hand, and by the Independents on the other. Knox gave the "notes of a true kirk of Christ," as three—faithful preaching of the Word, the right ministering of sacraments, and the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline: "wheresoever, then, these notes are seen, there without doubt is the true kirk of Christ," to which the "Confession" of 1560 adds the words, "not that universal, of which we have before spoken, but particular, such as was in Corinth," etc. But this definition of a church, simply amounts to a declaration, that where certain religious acts are performed by and for a certain body of people, there a church is, but affirms nothing as to the religious character or spiritual standing of those composing the church; in short, the "notes" go to show *that* it is, but not *what* it is. While the Scottish Reformers held that the performance of the three functions mentioned afforded proof of the existence of a "particular" church, "as at Corinth," etc., they would not have gone the length of affirming that such performances justified them in regarding the members of any such church as "sanctified in Christ, called to be saints," as the Apostle Paul addressed the particular church at Corinth, but only that where the three functions were performed, there a "true kirk" *was*. Beyond this they would not go, affirming only the fact of its existence in virtue of certain religious acts performed, but affirming nothing as to the character or spiritual condition of those who were members of a "true kirk," further than that their conduct was such as was free from "faults and suspicions" exposing them to discipline.

Now, the point at which Knox stopped short, is the point at which the distinctive principle of Congregational Independency comes in. Independents held that that which constituted a "true church" was "the joining of faithful Christians into fellowship" (to use the words of John Cotton in his *Way of the Churches*), and "that every true visible church is a company of people, called and separated from the world by the Word of God, and joined together by voluntary profession of faith in Jesus in the fellowship of the Gospel" (*Petition to James I.*) Whereas, according to Knox, the church was an institution providing the means by which men *might become* believers in Christ, according to the early Independents it was this and something more; it was a holy fellowship of those who sincerely avowed that they *were* believers: that which Knox left out they included

as essential to the very nature of a church as a company of professing and confessing believers in Christ. This, indeed, has continued to be the distinctive difference between Presbyterians and Independents from Knox's time to the present day.

It is not difficult to understand this omission and defect (from the point of view of Independency) on the part of Knox. It may be traced partly to the theological views, and partly to the socialistic aims of the early Scottish Reformers. Their view of the "catholic and invisible church" as composed of the "elect of all ages" disposed them to shrink from requiring personal confession of faith in Christ on the part of Church members, lest they might appear to assume to decide upon the spiritual standing of any individual, and to affirm whether or not he belonged to the invisible church known to God only; and therefore they required only such negative evidence as might be afforded in religious knowledge, and in the absence of scandalous conduct. Then, further, they had socialistic aims which discouraged any attempt to found churches upon the spiritual basis asserted by Independents. They aimed at the reconstruction of society, and sought to make the church and the nation identical. This could be done only by making the conditions of good citizenship and church membership the same, and by so conjoining the functions of the Church and the State that all the people might be included under one government of two branches, the "civil" and "ecclesiastical," and having one supreme sovereign and Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our further studies may serve to show how, under the influence of this splendid, but, as we believe, mis-guided ambition, the early Scottish Reformers drifted away from the Congregational Independency of the early years of their history.

THE CHURCH MEETING.

Under the title of "What the Churches ought to do," Mr. R. F. Horton, Congregational Minister, Hampstead, has contributed the following, which our readers will thank us for reproducing:—

I am going to take up my parable on the subject of the Church Meeting, and to describe a meeting at which you, my reader, were not, I believe, present; as, indeed, if you had been, it would not be necessary for me to describe it to you. Nor must I speak as if I myself had been an eye-witness or an ear-witness, except, perhaps, in the sense that one of old tells us, that he was in a valley of dry bones, and was commanded by the Lord to prophesy. "And," he adds, "I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them and they lived, and stood up upon their feet."

It chanced that the church in question was