

The Canadian Independent

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TORONTO, JAN 13th, 1881.

OUR PRESBYTERIANISM.

We are in receipt of a couple of letters, which may possibly to some extent be representative, and because of which, as well as out of regard to the writers, we propose to say a few words. The principal letter, enclosing the other is marked "private," but the writer gives us liberty to make what use we think proper of its contents, so that we break no confidence by making quotations. The burden of both writers is what they denominate the "Presbyterianism" of the INDEPENDENT, that it is not, in fact, true to its name, but is promulgating another and a less Scriptural system.

The writer whose letter is enclosed with the principal one, says: "I am not at all in sympathy with the semi-Presbyterianism of the INDEPENDENT. It does not read like our paper. When it professes to take up our views I fancy it seems to be done in the interest of Presbyterianism. I should be sorry if I thought our people were being moulded by it. . . . I have no patience with these distinctions about Congregationalism and Independency. I wish the Presbyterians would go home to the body they admire. . . . If our people sympathize with the C. I., we shall soon make ourselves laughing-stocks to the intelligent world by having church courts and trials for heresy. If the C. I. continues in the strain it is in, it will weaken us and prepare those who endorse it to go into Presbyterian Churches." The other writer in a similar manner says: "For some time past I have watched the course of the C. I. with much anxiety and dissatisfaction. . . . The feelings I have confessed have been especially awakened by the articles that have appeared in eulogy of the recent National Council at St. Louis. . . . Until now the C. I. has been in sympathy with the British type of Congregationalism, which I do not hesitate to say is incomparably the best."

The above is about all referring specially to the C. I., as the letter is principally filled with the tendencies of the National Council and the attitude, *pro* and *con*, of Congregationalists in the United States.

While feeling much respect for the writers of these letters, we really feel almost ashamed to say a word in reply. It is the old *odium ecclesiasticum*, and shows how good men can suffer a name to become a *bete noir*, and be frightened by a vision purely of their own conjuring. Just as in Presbyterianism and Methodism those who would give freedom of action are met with the cry of "Congregationalism," so among ourselves "Presbyterianism" is the bugaboo to oppose a needed good.

What is Presbyterianism? If it is anything at all it is a system of ecclesiastical machinery to mould all the churches under its control to one pattern, a Procrustean bed

on which the rack or the axe are to be applied to procure the desired uniformity. That it has failed in this object in the past, that it is still more notably failing to-day, does not alter the fact; power, authority, are the essence of its existence. By its theory the will of an individual church must bend to the will of the united churches as represented in their courts. This machinery, these courts, are permanent, as we noticed in our article of last week—"The Right of Reproof"—not called into existence temporarily to meet a special case as Congregational Councils. Such being the facts as to the system of Presbyterianism, it is evident that those who guard as a sacred right the independence of each particular church cannot move one step towards Presbyterianism. That can only be reached over the slain body of independence. Now with that fact as a starting-point, let us ask when and where has the INDEPENDENT uttered one disloyal word to this regnant principle of our existence as churches? On the contrary, we have not once or twice, but repeatedly spoken of this as a point beyond question or discussion. We have made the fact prominent again and again, and have regarded it as the underlying truth of our congregationalism. But what have we done, then? Why, we have been true to the motto of our paper: "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." True to it in its fulness and completeness. Some of our friends will take the first half, but they object to the second; or, rather, perhaps they do not object to the privileges, but they very much object to the duties and responsibilities it involves. [We are not now speaking of the writers of the letters.] If I am a member of a family, I must care for the welfare and good name of all my brethren. The head of the family may give me the fullest liberty of action, but it is always implied that my actions shall not harm or disgrace the rest. How many families are groaning to-day under the disgrace brought upon them by individual members; and are there not churches and communities of churches suffering in like manner?

Here, if we mistake not, is the head and front of our offending, that we have insisted that churches calling themselves Congregational, although no other church or churches can claim any authority over them, owe an allegiance of love to other churches of the same faith and order, all the more imperative because of the lack of that authority. We have said, and say again, that they have no moral right to imperil the good name of their brethren, to gratify a fancy or liking of their own, and that if they do this they virtually withdraw themselves from their brethren. Ecclesiastically there is nothing to prevent an Independent church placing whom it will in its pulpit, or adopting any heresy it pleases, but if it persists in its own course, unheeding the remonstrances of sister churches, it must not be surprised to find that it has lost their sympathy, and that they decline to be associated with it.

As to the distinction between Independency and Congregationalism with which our friend has "no pa-

tiency," we say they are one, joined together by God, two truths blended into one—allegiance only to Christ; love and sympathy to brethren, but it is ultra-Independency, that with rude and violent hands would divide them, casting aside that portion of the truth that is most irksome to it, forgetting that in doing this it is denying all, for He who spoke the part spoke the whole.

The friends who talk of English Congregationalism do not appreciate its positions and surroundings. Under the shadow of a dominant State-Church, having to struggle and to suffer therefor, it is not matter for surprise that the aspect of their principles brought most to the front has been the right of Independency, none the less, however, when they have been setting forth their system in its rounded fulness, have they given the social inter-dependent aspect. No exponent of our principles is entitled to such a respectful hearing as Dr. Wardlaw; he is *par excellence* their champion, and we would commend to all who would place English Congregationalism in opposition to our utterances, to read the following short extract from his great work. He is speaking of the fellowship of the churches.

Did our space permit we could make the writer's object still more clear by fuller quotation, but these must suffice. We advise all who can to read the book.

It has been often said to Congregationalists, "You have no visible union; your system is a rope of sand; it has no cohesion. . . . Were it true that our system is incompatible with union, I at once admit that the objection would be a serious, and even a fatal one; fatal, because showing it to be destitute of an essential feature of resemblance to the constitution of the churches of the New Testament. There is union. The churches are distinct, yet one. Ours is a union of *fellowship* and *co-operation*, but not a union of *jurisdiction* or *authority*. . . . Of this kind of union we are fondly tenacious. So tenacious of it, indeed, have some Congregationalists been, that they have even rejected the designation of *independents*, solely on the ground of its being apt to be misunderstood as if it disclaimed such union. . . . Nothing can be more revolting, because nothing more unlike the Bible, than the idea of churches all in a state of insulation as that, instead of the lovely harmony of reciprocal confidence and friendly intercourse, each should appear like a separate fortress, surrounded by its walls and ramparts, with spies on the battlements, and sentinels at the gates, watching with anxious jealousy, to prevent the entrance of intruders from the rest. . . . That would be a state of things as opposite to the condition of the apostolic churches as division is to unity, enmity to love, darkness to light. . . . Allied to the free right of soliciting advice in difficulty, is the right of one church to remonstrate with another that has embraced serious and soul-endangering error. This, indeed, is not only a right, but a duty, not competent only, but incumbent. Although independents disown the right of any one church to interfere authoritatively in the concerns of another,—as well as that of any number of churches, or any court of the representatives of such churches, to take upon them such authoritative interference; yet when among churches of the same order, professing to walk in fellowship with each other, one is discovered to have "departed from the faith," whether in regard to truths of which the belief is essential to the soul's salvation, or to articles of doctrine akin to these, and by which their divine integrity is endangered,—other churches—those more especially in the same neighbourhood . . . are called upon to deal, in faithfulness and love, with their erring brethren; . . . and should they fail of success, to "shake off the dust of their feet against them," and renounce their fellowship, till the Lord may Himself be pleased to bring them to a right mind.—To require the production of an express precept or example for such dealing

of church with church is an unreasonable requisition. The necessity and the duty of it are involved in every precept, every example, and every principle by which the obligation to purity of communion is enforced upon the churches.

A word or two as to our attitude towards Presbyterianism. We very heartily wish it success as an agency for doing Christ's work, but we have no sympathy whatever with its system; as we view it, it is man-made, cumbrous, and withal fails to attain the ends for which it exists. The churches of that body are becoming more Congregational year by year. Presbyteries may resolve and make rules, but they are impotent to enforce. This fact must be recognized, sooner or later; the sooner the better for the peace of that body. Just as it is unable to enforce the laws of its courts on the churches, so it is helpless to keep improper men out of its ministry; indeed in some cases, there is not the pretence of trying; men have been admitted without a single enquiry as to antecedents in quarters where alone truth could be learned. The looseness of some of our churches has been paralleled by the looseness of Presbyteries. Congregationalism embodies, we firmly believe, the principle of the New Testament *Ecclesia* and just as men emerge from the mists of old prejudices, and the traditions of hierarchial usurpations, will they recognize this, but to be Congregationalists men must be educated, intelligent, baptized into the spirit of their Master.

Here we leave the subject. Its importance must be our apology for the length of this article, and when at our next Union meeting, we step down and out of what has been anything but an "Editor's Easy Chair" for the last year, we shall hope to see it occupied by some one who will be loyal to our principles in their completeness.

FOREIGN MISSIONS.*

We take the opportunity, reviewing the work of Dr. Christlieb, of drawing the attention of our churches to the world-field of missions, an interest in which will do much to stimulate our faith, and lift us out from the thick darkness of the selfish church and individual. Unless our Indian missions, to which individuals of other denominations largely contribute, we have no active, united interest in a foreign field; though we know, or should know, that our sister churches at home and across the border are large shareholders in the work of Protestant Foreign Missions; witness the London Missionary Society and the American Board of Foreign Missions. Our home work, no doubt, must absorb for some time the greater part of our energies. Nevertheless, there are thoughtful men among us who believe that a little manifested interest in the great world-work of missions would elevate our piety and encourage our zeal. This little manual of Dr. Christlieb's is not a *history* of missions, but a bird's-eye view of the work of to-day, drawn from official reports and Missionary Conferences. A few of its facts, with comments, we give, assuring

*Protestant Foreign Missions: their present state. A Universal Survey, by Dr. Christlieb, of Bonn University, Boston. Congregational Publishing Company.