

are sometimes asked, and in some measure ready to conclude, that our mission as Congregationalists will be fulfilled, and no more valid reason remain for our denominational existence.

But here I answer, there is in our Congregationalism a fundamental law which we call *principle*, greater, broader, deeper, higher than any of the forms of its application. That principle can *never* be invalidated. It is the life germ of Christianity itself. Discipleship began those three years of unparalleled ministry when there gathered around the Saviour, one by one, the disciples. Two of them were following the great wilderness preacher. When the Messiah was pointed out to them they follow him. It is from personal choice one brings his brother. The inviting command "follow me" brings others until a company is formed, and so throughout the whole history of the church, the "I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me," has been verified. The mighty magnetism has attracted men into discipleship, men from every walk of life, in every stage of intellectuality. The process is simple. individual choice forming the true discipleship.

What to-day is the essence of christianity? Adhesion to this or that form of doctrine or practice? If so, when did it change? Discipleship, personal, voluntary, was its essence when the principles of His kingdom were laid down by its great founder. Then the individual disciple was the unit of christianity and not the sect, and in personal attachment to the saviour is the true secret of christian union, not the aggregation of churches. True union arises from the manly recognition by all, that a man is a christian, not because he accepts a certain set of doctrines and practices, a certain form of baptism or a particular style of vestment, but because of his admiration for, and personal attachment to, our common Lord and Master. It is the sincere and hearty acceptance of the revelation of the divine. "I believe in Christ." Not only do I acknowledge Him, He is *my* Lord, *my* Redeemer. There may be many a belief more or less closely connected with this central truth. There will of necessity be many articles beyond the creed of the apostles, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God" and joyous exclamation, "My Lord, My God," and in these particulars we may be right and we may be wrong. They are not the ground of our acceptance with God, but this is. They do not touch the deepest, keenest want in our nature, but this does. They are not our salvation, but this is; therefore they are not the basis of true union, but this fundamental principle is at once the basis of our christianity and our *fellowship*. Congregationalism is a witness for this liberty, liberty of personal attachment to Christ. A witness, standing up boldly for the true basis of christ-

ian fellowship and apostolic polity, because in these is the power of a "continuous adjustment," meeting every new requirement in the true evolution of man. The time is not yet discernible in the distant horizon when the need for such testimony, distinctly and unequivocally given, shall cease to exist.

When that time comes, then, and not till then, may we furl our banner. To use the eloquent words of another, "when we have gone armed before our brethren as the vanguard of the great christian host, opening their way into the land of promise, when the victory is being celebrated and peace proclaimed, then we may fold our tents like the Arabs and as silently steal away."

It may, however, be asked in our work of bringing souls to the Master, in beautifying lives for whom He died, would you take simply this broad, this fundamental basis of christianity, casting overboard all system or systematic doctrinal teaching? By no means. I am aware that there is now, as ever and perhaps *more* now than ever, a disposition to break from the moorings of the old theology and vaunt what is termed the new; *Advanced thought, modern criticism*—with an occasional fling at orthodoxy, and claim that such is bold-daring, too courageous to be trammelled with the superstitions of the past age. It is well to know that it frequently calls for more courage to cling to the old than to run after the new, because it happens to be the prevailing fashion for the time being. I do not hold that the old walls of theological thought should encircle, and so hamper our searchings after truth, but I fail to see the wisdom of pulling down the old walls and removing the landmarks of our fathers before we have by us anything better to take their place.

There must of necessity be something of system in which to formulate human thought. Therefore, the opposition to all forms or creeds is often neither the evidence of advanced thought or sound judgment. And the flaunting in the face of sensible people the latest pattern of modern uncertainty, alias "the most recent discovery," is not the highest ideal of scholarly christian conduct. This class of minds are ever restless under the restraint of custom, and impatient to break from every mooring of the past. They cannot bear to be indebted to the past. They would rather be without the very outline of a theology than be indebted for it to the generation gone by. We may well ask, what the fathers have done that the thoughts they thought, the prayers they prayed—the conclusions at which they arrived after many a manful struggle, should be thus unceremoniously consigned to the limbo of forgetfulness? To say they made mistakes is simply to say they were men and not angels. But to say that they left nothing we may heartily accept and safely follow, is to betray a profound lack of knowledge and