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CHURCH AND STATE IN NEW ENGLAND: EFFECTS UPON AMERICAN CONGREGATIONALISM.

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SINCE the union of church and state in the fourth century, no form of the connection has been more intimate than that set up in New England. Fleeing from the evils of the Anglican establishment, our Puritan fathers, unable to emancipate themselves from the customs of Christendom, made church and state substantially identical. We propose to detail their system, and then show its sad effects on American Congregationalism.

THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY COLONY.

Salem was settled in 1628; Boston in 1630. The first General Court met in Boston in the same year. Seven months thereafter, on May 18, 1631, that Court restricted the right to vote in civil affairs to adult male church-members.[1] The colonists had come hither with no fixed ecclesiastical principles or usages. They, unlike the Pilgrims, lacked uniformity. Soon confusion began to prevail. They felt the need of rules of ecclesiastical order as greatly as they had felt the necessity of restricting suffrage. Yet the General Court did not presume to enact such rules, but in-

[1] The law reads: "To the end the body of the commons may be preserved of honest and good men, it was likewise ordered and agreed that for time to come no man shall be admitted to the freedom of this body politic, but such as are members of some of the churches within the limits of the same."—Mass. Records (Shurtleff), Vol. i. p. 87.

stead it adopted, in 1635, a minute, recognizing the right of the churches to frame and adopt "one uniform order of discipline," and entreated them to do so.[1] In the same minute the civil power asked the ecclesiastical to define the functions of magistrates in enforcing church discipline, which, in 1648, the churches did.[2] These two acts of the General Court are significant. The earlier one, expressing the sentiments of past and contemporary Christendom, placed the state within the control of the churches. The later one, a prophecy of the coming separation of church and state and of religious liberty, placed in the control of the churches creed, discipline, and the limitation of state interposition in church matters. This began since Constantine, a new era.

If only church-members could vote and hold office, there needed to be some limit put upon the gathering of the excluded into churches, else whoever wished could become freemen simply by organizing themselves into churches. This short way into freedom began to be taken, causing "much trouble and disturbance." Taught by "sad experience," the General Court, in 1636, enacted a law defining what should be recognized as duly constituted churches. Such churches must first secure the approbation of the magistrates and the consent of a majority "of the churches in the jurisdiction," to their formation, or their members could not vote or hold office.[3] Naturally those thus excluded

[1] "This court doth entreat the elders and brethren of every church within this jurisdiction that they will consult and advise of one uniform order of discipline in the churches, agreeable to the Scriptures, and then to consider how far the magistrates are bound to interpose for the preservation of that uniformity and peace of the churches."—Mass. Records, Vol. i. pp. 142, 143.

[2] Cambridge Platform, Chap. xvii.

[3] After assigning reasons for the law, it was "ordered that all persons are to take notice that this Court doth not, nor will hereafter, approve of any such companies of men as shall henceforth join in any pretended way of church fellowship, without they shall first acquaint the magistrates, and the elders of the greater part of the churches in this jurisdiction with their intentions, and have their approbation therein. And further, it was ordered, that

sought retaliation by refusing to support the privileged churches; but not so could they escape. The General Court, in 1638, enacted a law compelling such support.[1] This made the state-church supreme. Yet questions had arisen whether the law of 1631 applied also to town affairs. No one in the colony could vote or hold office unless a member of some recognized church therein; were the several towns subject to this law in choosing selectmen and other officers? So the Court decreed in 1635.[2] Again, two years later, the law of 1631 was defined so as to exclude all from office except freemen.[3] Lest these rigid laws should be relaxed by parties within the churches, the Court decreed that none but the moral and orthodox should be allowed to act as magistrates or deputies, or be voted for under a heavy penalty.[4] The

no person, being a member of any church which shall hereafter be gathered without the approbation of the magistrates, and the greater part of the said churches, shall be admitted to the freedom of this commonwealth."—Mass. Records, Vol. i. p. 168.

[1] After reciting reasons, the law runs: "It is therefore hereby declared, that every inhabitant in any town is liable to contribute to all charges, both in church and commonwealth, whereof he doth or may receive benefit; and withal it is also ordered, that every such inhabitant who shall not voluntarily contribute, proportionately to his ability, with other freemen of the same town, to all common charges, as well for upholding the ordinances in the church as otherwise, shall be compelled thereto by assessment and distress to be levied by the constable, or other officer of the town, as in other cases." —Mass. Records, Vol. i. pp. 240, 241.

[2] "It was ordered, that none but freemen shall have any vote in any town, in any action of authority, or necessity, or that which belongs to them by virtue of their freedom, as receiving of inhabitants, and laying out of lots, etc."—Mass. Records, Vol. i. p. 161.

[3] "It is the intent and order of the Court that no person shall hereafter be chosen to any office in the commonwealth but such as are freemen."— Mass. Records, Vol. i. p. 188.

[4] 1654. "Forasmuch as, according to the present form of government of this jurisdiction, the safety of the commonwealth, the right administration of justice, the preservation of the peace, and purity of the churches of Christ therein, under God, doth much depend upon the piety, wisdom, and soundness of the General Court, not only magistrates but deputies, it is therefore ordered by this Court and the authority thereof, that no man, although a

body of freemen was very small, and the burdens so heavy, that not all who could would qualify as freemen; so, in 1643, the General Court took action thereon, ordering that the churches "be written unto, to deal with them."[1] As this church discipline, if undertaken, did not correct the evil, the General Court devised a more effective way, that met the case.[2] But these safeguards were not enough. Schismatical preaching disturbed the peace; and so this evil fountain was sought to be closed by a law forbidding preaching without the approval of churches and magistrates.[3] This law of 1653 proved to be too general; so, in 1658, a more stringent law was passed, forbidding preaching "to any company of people, whether in church society or not," and ordination, "where any two organic churches, council of state, or General Court, shall declare their dissatisfaction thereat."[4]

freeman, shall be accepted as a deputy in the General Court, that is unsound in judgment concerning the main points of the Christian religion as they have been held forth and acknowledged by the generality of the Protestant Orthodox writers, or that is scandalous in his conversation, or that is unfaithful to this government; and it is further ordered, that it shall not be lawful for any freeman to make choice of any such person as aforesaid that is known to himself to be under such offence or offences before specified, upon pain or penalty of five pounds, and that the cases of such persons to be tried by the whole General Court."—Mass. Records, Vol. iv. part i. p. 206.

[1] Mass. Records, Vol. ii. p. 38.

[2] "There being within this jurisdiction many members of churches, who, to exempt themselves from all public service in the commonwealth, will not come in to be made freeman, it is ordered by this Court, and the authority thereof, that all such members of churches in the several towns within this jurisdiction shall not be exempt from such public service as they are chosen to by the freemen of the several towns;" if they refused to act they were liable to a fine of twenty shillings.—Mass. Records, Vol. ii. p. 208.

[3] "It is enacted by this Court, that no person shall undertake any constant course of public preaching or prophesying within this jurisdiction without the approbation of the elders of the four next neighboring churches, or of the county court to which the place belongs." This law was enforced by penalties.—Mass. Records, Vol. iv. part i. p. 122.

[4] "It is ordered, that henceforth no person shall publicly and constantly preach to any company of people, whether in church society or not, or be ordained to the office of a teaching elder, where any two organic churches,

Thus in this church-state no one could vote or hold office but adult male members of the Congregational churches; no church could be organized without the consent of magistrates and the majority of the churches; no inhabitant could escape church rates, proportionate to his ability; no one could have a share in town government but the said members of the town church; no one of scandalous life, or of unsound faith, or of unfaithful conduct, could serve as deputy in the General Court, or be voted for knowingly without a heavy fine; and no one could be ordained as a minister, or preach, if any two churches, or the council of state, or the General Court should object. Nor is this all. Those established churches guarded their own doors more rigorously than any other churches,—a point hitherto unnoticed, we believe, in this connection. Throughout Christendom, suffrage was then limited to church-members, or to a narrower body of citizens; but to become a church-member, except among Baptists, was easy—infant baptism, then, later on, confirmation. Presbyterians were a little more rigid; yet when those baptized in infancy "come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body, they ought to be informed, it is their duty, and their privilege, to come to the Lord's Supper."[1] They held also that "the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized."[2] This was not exclusive enough for the Congregational churches. As the other communions baptized all infants, it was feared that the implication that no infants but those of pious parents

council of state, or General Court, shall declare their dissatisfaction thereat, either in reference to doctrine or practice, the said offence being declared to the said company of people, church or person, until the offence be orderly removed: and in case of ordination of any teaching elder, timely notice thereof shall be given unto three or four of the neighboring organic churches for their approbation."—Mass. Records, Vol. iv. part i. p. 328.

[1] Directory of Worship, Chap. ix. sect. 1.

[2] Westminster Confession, Chap. xxix. sect. 4.

could be baptized would not protect from the universal custom elsewhere; so the Congregationalists in England, in 1658, added to the section above quoted the exclusive words "and those only."[1] This was approved, in 1680, by the Massachusetts churches. But the few infants thus permitted to be baptized, derived no ecclesiastical benefit from the rite, as did those in other communions. For the easier admissions to full membership were rejected, and it was agreed that those baptized in infancy, "as well as others, should come to their trial and examination, and manifest their faith and repentance by an open profession thereof, before they are to be received to the Lord's Supper, and otherwise not to be admitted thereunto."[2] Thus baptismal regeneration, and even the presumption that the infants baptized were regenerated, were rejected in this form of admission. The Congregationalists set themselves, like the Baptists, against Christendom, not giving to infant baptism even a presumptive proof of regeneration, but required the same proof of conversion in the baptized as in others. These two doctrinal points greatly restricted membership in the church-state.

Having proved the rigor of the identity of church and state in Massachusetts Bay by the laws themselves, we may note more briefly some ways in which the sword of the state was used by the hand of the church. The state constrained church attendance "by fine and imprisonment;" looked carefully after ministerial support; ordered the catechising of the children; postponed the formation of particular churches; called synods and approved their platforms; interposed in the settlement of church troubles; forbade certain churches calling pastors; prohibited the preaching of particular ministers named; called, or ordered to be called,

[1] Savoy Confession, Chap. xxix. sect. 4.

[2] Cambridge Platform (1648), Chap. xii. sect. 7.

ecclesiastical councils; and many other such like things, by special vote, in harmony with the Cambridge Platform.

As the church-members were a very small minority in any town and in the colony, their state-church system encountered not only the opposition of Quakers and Baptists, but also of influential colonists. In consequence, in 1658, Englishmen, on certain conditions of age, property, and allegiance, could be elected constables and jurymen, and they could vote for selectmen, and on assessments and certain other "prudentials."[1] Apparently in fear of the restoration, the General Court, in 1660, reaffirmed "the ancient law," giving the full rights of freemen only to "members of some church of Christ," "in full communion."[2] But in response to "his majesty's letter" in reference to "the laws and charter" of the colony, the General Court, in 1663, appointed a committee to obtain the "apprehensions" of the "elders and other of the freemen, or other inhabitants," that some plan might, if possible, "be deduced and agreed upon," that should be "satisfactory and safe."[3] In trying to save their ecclesiastical and civil system from impending ruin by its enemies at home and abroad, "other inhabitants" than the freemen were to be consulted, and so conciliated. As a result of the inquiry, the General Court, in 1664, declared "that the law prohibiting all persons except members of churches" from voting and holding office, was repealed. It also at the same time enacted "that from henceforth all Englishmen, possessing a certificate . . . that they are orthodox in religion, and not vicious in their lives, and also a certificate . . . that they are freeholders, and are . . . rateable . . . to the full value of ten shillings, or that they are in full communion with some church amongst us, . . . being twenty-four years of age, householders and settled inhabitants in this jurisdiction," might have "their desires" for

[1] Mass. Records, Vol. iv. part. i. p. 336. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 420.

[3] Mass. Records, Vol. iv. part ii. p. 74.

"admittance to the freedom of this commonwealth" decided by vote of the General Court, "according to the rules of our patent."[1] The General Court found it also needful, in 1668, to declare "that by the church is to be meant such as are in full communion only."[2] It was enacted also, in 1673, that the names of those desiring to become freemen should be recorded and read before the whole Court, but should not be voted on "till the Court of Election next following."[3] Thus the colony guarded its system.

But in this identity of church and state, liberty was not destroyed as in other established churches; for the state jealously guarded the essential freedom of each local church as independent under Christ. Those churches in synod and by express provision in their platform of discipline had provided for the sword of the magistrate in ecclesiastical affairs.[4] And before the framing of that platform, the General Court, in 1646, judged it contrary to the nature of the church "to compel any to enter into the fellowship of the church," or "force them to partake in the ordinances peculiar to the church (which do require voluntary subjection thereto)."[5] Again, in 1668, twenty years after the Cambridge Platform, the General Court defined the relation existing between the Christian magistrate and the churches more explicitly, saying: "Whereas the Christian magistrate is bound by the word of God to preserve the peace, order, or liberty of the churches of Christ, and by all due means to promote religion in doctrine and discipline, according to the word of God; and whereas, by our law . . . it is ordered and declared, that every church hath free liberty of calling, election, and ordination of all her officers from time to time, provided they be able, pious, and orthodox; for the better explanation of the said laws, and as an addition thereunto, this Court doth order and declare . . . that by a church is to be

[1] Mass. Records, Vol. iv. part ii. p. 118. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 396. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 562.
[4] Cambridge Platform, Chap. xvii. [5] Mass. Records, Vol. ii. pp. 177, 178.

meant such are in full communion only, . . . and that no inhabitants in any town shall challenge a right unto or act in the calling or election of such officer or minister, until he be in full communion, upon the penalty of being accounted a disturber of peace and order, and to be punished by the Court of that shire, either by admonition, security for the good behavior, fine, or imprisonment, according to the quality and degree of the offence."[1] The freedom of the churches, in their most essential points, was thus maintained on one side against the encroachments of the magistrates, and on the other against the intervention of those not members. Each church, unless heretical or disorderly, had perfect liberty. Neither the state nor the town could impose creed or pastor upon it. The majority of the town unless members could not vote on its affairs. It completed its own discipline, which the state enforced. It elected the town deputy in the General Court, and changed him at pleasure. In short, the local churches had ecclesiastical liberty in severalty, and supreme civil power collectively. There was, we believe, in no other form of the union of church and state, so great liberty.

In 1684, Massachusetts Bay, like the other New England colonies, lost for a time its separate existence. "The elaborate fabric that had been fifty-four years in building, was levelled with the dust. . . . The abrogation of that charter swept the whole away. Massachusetts, in English law, . . . belonged to the King of England."[2]

THE OTHER NEW ENGLAND COLONIES.

Massachusetts Bay was the leading colony. New Haven colony was like it. Plymouth and Connecticut were more liberal. Yet in them "the franchise was conferred on inhabitants of the respective towns by the votes, or on the

[1] Mass. Records, Vol. iv. part ii. p. 396.

[2] Palfrey's Hist. of New England, Vol. iii. p. 394.

recommendation, of such as were already freemen or residents therein. But it may reasonably be believed that church-membership—or, to speak more precisely, a religious character in the candidate, such as led naturally to church-membership, and was commonly found in union with it—was also in Plymouth and Connecticut much regarded by the electors as a qualification of candidates for citizenship."[1] The Pilgrims were more liberal than the Puritans; and among the Puritans the associates of Hooker were less rigid than the associates of Cotton. In the freer colonies "the association between church-members and citizenship was not by law made definite and indispensable," and, besides, "there was less action of the government upon church affairs."[2] The Massachusetts Bay and the Plymouth colonies were united under the new charter of 1692; and the New Haven colony united with the Connecticut colony in 1665, becoming liberalized thereby.

In Rhode Island, even before its charter in 1643–44, under the legislations of the several towns, "absolute religious liberty was secured to each inhabitant;" and the laws of 1647, under the charter, guaranteed the same liberty. "No man has ever been persecuted in that sovereignty for his religious opinions and practices from its first settlement in 1636."[3] Yet this colony in 1663–64, denied to Roman Catholics the privileges of freemen,[4] when offering them to other Christians "of competent estates and civil conversation." The time had not come when the most liberal colony could safely throw open its citizenship to all men.

The feeble and dissimilar settlements in New Hampshire, in 1641, wisely sought and found absorption in the Massachusetts Bay colony. But, in 1677, the English government gave judgment that New Hampshire did not fall

[1] Palfrey's Hist. of New England, Vol. ii. p. 8.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 40. [3] Armitage's Hist. of the Baptists, p. 649.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 650, 651.

within the chartered limits of the said colony, and so in 1679 it began a separate colonial existence. What has been said of the Massachusetts Bay colony applies therefore to New Hampshire.

Contrasting infant Canada and infant New England, Parkman says: "In their character, as in their destiny, the rivals were widely different; yet, at the outset, New England was unfaithful to the principle of her existence. Seldom has religious tyranny assumed a form more oppressive than among the Puritan exiles. New England Protestantism appealed to liberty; then closed the door against her. On a stock of freedom she grafted a scion of despotism; yet the vital juices of the root penetrated at last to the uttermost branches, and nourished them to an irrepressible strength and expansion." He adds in a note: "Church and state were not united: they were identified. A majority of the people, including men of wealth, ability, and character, were deprived of the rights of freemen, because they were not church-members. When some of them petitioned the General Court for redress, they were imprisoned and heavily fined as guilty of sedition."[1]

This oppression was born of the past, and intensified by environment, and jealousy for the liberty which this state-church contained. Its rigor may have been justified by the dangers threatening that liberty. There was a pure democracy in the bosom of each town, which by subsequent enlargement made the town a democracy, and so, the state and nation. The famous compact signed in the cabin of the Mayflower, on Nov. 21, 1620, was the germ. That compact, drawn from the Pilgrim church-covenant, "first conceived" and "first exemplified" the principle that *the will of a majority of the people shall govern.*"[2] "This was the birth of popular constitutional liberty."[3] It is hardly too much to

[1] Pioneers of France, etc., p. 396.

[2] Baylies' Hist. of New Plymouth, Vol. i. p. 29.

[3] Bancroft's Hist. of the United States (Centennial Ed.), Vol. i. p. 244.

say, that democratic government by "just and equal laws," enacted for "the general good," opposed as it then was by all the world besides, justified considerable rigor, to preserve it. The polity that gave birth to this compact became the polity of New England. The right to protect themselves from intruders was unquestionably theirs. To protect from enemies, not to compel uniformity of belief, was their motive in their so-called "persecutions." At any rate they were the best judges of the need of protection under penalties, and their debtors who acquiesce in the exclusion of the Chinese from this great Republic should give them who did so much to make the Republic the benefit of all doubts.

The colonies of New England preserved their free churches, little Christian democracies in political environments, until constraint was no longer possible or needful, when, as we shall see, separation between church and state began, and went on apace, until in the present century it was completed. Against every step of that separation good men bitterly contended, fearing great loss to religion. Dr. Lyman Beecher tells us how men felt, when, in 1818, the election in Connecticut cut the last strand of connection: "The injury done to the cause of Christ, as we then supposed, was irreparable. For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell *for the best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut.* It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God."[1] The complete separation came later in Massachusetts, a blessing to the Congregational churches. But, unfortunately, American Congregationalism was modified by its contact with the state, and some of its abnormal developments are still clung to as tenaciously as state connection used to be. It is worth our while to examine our inheritance, and find out, though it may be with surprise and tears, what of our present posses-

[1] Autobiography, Vol. i. p. 344.

sions came to us through the illegitimate union of church and state in New England.

THE COUNCIL SYSTEM.

Though we have considered this elsewhere,[1] with the unchallenged proof, we may add that the laws we have above quoted, together with the last chapters of the Cambridge Platform, logically ended in councils for the organization of churches, for ordination and installation, and for church troubles,—which constitutes our council system. This system, with its politico-ecclesiastical origin, was effective when the sword of the state enforced it; but when the coercive power of the magistrate began to weaken, until it ceased altogether, it became in large degree impotent to protect fellowship.[2] Councils could advise as before; in some particulars the courts have enforced their advice when accepted by one or by both of the parties calling the council; but in the matter of fellowship the council system has broken down. This will appear hereafter. Mutual councils, as bodies of reference, will survive as necessary expedients or resorts in questions of church and ministerial standing and troubles.[3]

THE PARISH SYSTEM.

The colonists brought the territorial parish with them. At first every town or precinct was a single parish. As only church-members could vote, the freemen had a double function: first, as church-members, to care for all church and ecclesiastical matters, as such; and secondly, as freemen, to care for all civil, criminal, and political matters, as such. In each parish they were both church and town. From the beginning in the Plymouth and Connecticut colonies, as we have seen, a few who were not church-members could vote

[1] The Church-Kingdom, pp. 268–271.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 161, 178, 181, 290–292.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 160–165, 285–287.

in the town-meeting on civil, but not on ecclesiastical, questions. After a generation and a half the same was true in all the colonies. Thus the churches began to be separated from the towns or territorial parishes. Only church-members could vote on the admission, discipline, and dismissal of members, the election of deacons, elders, delegates in councils, creeds, and other purely church matters; but on all matters pertaining to the church edifice and manse, the salary, and its assessment on the inhabitants, the freemen who were not church-members could also vote. The records of the town and its church were kept together as one in most of the towns of Massachusetts, down to the present century.[1] As the pastor of the church was also the minister of the town, his call and settlement required the joint action of church and town. The church acted first; then the town voted to concur or not to concur. If the town voted to concur, all went well; but if a minority in the church combined with enough freemen who were not church-members to refuse concurrence, or if the latter were an adverse majority in the town, then, in either case, a dead-lock ensued between town and church. These troubles occurred so often that at last the General Court interposed by a law, referring them to a council of three neighboring churches. This did not mend the matter; and the free and independent churches humbled themselves in their chosen bondage, sometimes to the nomination, by a vote, to the town of three or four candidates, "that whomsoever of these the choice falls upon," says the historian, "it may still be said: 'The church has chosen him.'" But the town replied to all complaints of the enslaved churches: "We must maintain him."[2] This humiliation from the throne of power was the first stage in the evolution of the parish, which our churches experienced.

But later on the parish was separated from the town,

[1] Palfrey's History of New England, Vol. ii. pp. 14, 15.

[2] Cotton Mather's Ratio Disciplinæ (1719), Art. ii. §§ 2, 3.

the churches strangely clinging to that parish system, which, says the lamented Dr. Dexter, "we have not yet ceased to have cause to lament."[1] When other denominations sprang up, and when tax-payers began to be allowed to "sign off" from the support of the established churches in the several towns, the parish was no longer territorial, nor identical with the town. Each parish, however, though smaller than the town, retained all the rights of the town in its relation to the church, the chief of which is that of a concurrent vote. The tyranny of this relation of a church to its parish was not fully revealed until 1820, when the Supreme Court of Massachusetts decided, that, "as to all civil purposes, the secession of a whole church from the parish would be an extinction of the church," and "this is not only reasonable, but it is conformable to the usages of the country."[2] The churches which had boasted of their free polity raised a storm of opposition at this exposure of their true condition; but, ten years later, the same Court by unanimous decision reaffirmed it.[3] That decision still stands. The churches which began in New England by becoming the state, came out of state connection in absolute bondage to a parish system, which they could not secede from without legal extinction. In consequence of this bondage we sustained great loss in church, property, and prestige;[4] and yet our churches would not discard this relic of the church-state. But, after waiting in vain for seventy years for a reversal of that decision, our churches in New England are slowly beginning to cast off the parish system. It is beginning to be felt that the distinction between the secular and the spiritual in church matters does not demand the dual organization of parish and church: that it belongs as much to a church, as such, to pay

[1] Congregationalism in Literature, p. 421.

[2] Baker *vs.* Fales, 16 Mass., 503, 504.

[3] Stebbins *vs.* Jenkins, 10 Pick. (Mass.) 171.

[4] Clark's Congregational Churches in Massachusetts, pp. 270–275, 300–303.

its pastor as to worship God in prayer and praise; and that, consequently, a single organization is more simple, safe, and expedient, as it is the only New Testament plan.[1]

LAX DISCIPLINE.

Under the identity of church and state in New England, as elsewhere under looser connections of the two, church discipline would no doubt have become lax in the course of time; but, before that period arrived fully, the separation began, and the withdrawal of the coercive power of the magistrate left the book of discipline deficient. That order of discipline, framed in 1648, gave "the civil magistrate power in matters ecclesiastical," "to take care of matters of religion," to restrain and punish for "heresy, venting corrupt and pernicious opinions that destroy the foundation," and other such things. Then, too, "if any church, one or more, shall grow schismatical, rending itself from the communion of other churches, or shall walk incorrigibly or obstinately in any corrupt way of their own, ... in such case the magistrate is to put forth his coercive power."[2] We have seen how that power was exercised on all sides and in every need. When the chapter in which the Platform culminated fell into desuetude, by the separation of church and state, nothing in the colonies, save in Connecticut, was introduced to remedy the defect. The wall of the citadel was falling to the ground on one side, but the garrison refused all plans of protection, though proposed time after time. Connecticut, however, through its Assembly, "being made sensible of the defects of discipline in the churches of this government," called a synod, in 1708, "to consider and agree upon those methods and rules for the management of ecclesiastical discipline, which by them shall be judged agreeable and conformable to the word of God."[3] That

[1] Cambridge Platform, Chap. xvii. sect. 6, 8, 9.

[2] Dexter's Congregationalism, p. 206.

[3] Contributions Eccl. Hist. Conn., p. 13.

synod made the Saybrook Platform, which the Assembly ordained "that all the churches . . . that are, or shall be, thus united, shall be owned and acknowledged established by law."[1] By that remedy the consociated churches were empowered to give "a final issue, and all parties therein concerned" were compelled to "sit down and be determined thereby."[2] This kept the churches in Connecticut from apostasy,[3] when so many in Massachusetts under the Cambridge Platform lapsed into error. But the authority given councils by that Platform was foreign to the principles of our polity, and by going too far the attempts in other colonies to mend their broken Platform were perhaps frustrated. What was needed was a remedy in harmony with the independence of the local church. It was not discovered. Hence, in the other colonies, the attempt was made to administer discipline by the Cambridge Platform, with the last chapter, which gave it efficiency, left out. We have shown elsewhere the sad failure.[4] So manifest became the inadequacy of the Platform of 1648, after the complete separation of church and state, that the ministers of Massachusetts appointed an able committee to repair the breach. That committee reported, in 1846, a Manual. They did honest work. In their Report they inquire, "What can be done to remove the evils which have come upon us in consequence of our declining, in various respects, from the ways of our Puritan fathers?" They then point out certain "outgrown principles," "obscurities," and "deficiencies." They quote from the Worcester Central Association: "'Such looseness, neglect, and disagreement,' as now exist among us, 'are neither seemly nor profitable; nor would they in other communities be tolerated.'" "The want of agreement in church polity has been very disadvantageous

[1] Contributions Eccl. Hist. Conn., p. 38. [2] Saybrook Platform, Art. v.

[3] Contributions Eccl. Hist. Conn., pp. 70, 274, 278.

[4] "Some Neglected Factors in Congregational Fellowship," in the New Englander (1883), pp. 473–476.

to the cause of Congregationalism, and, if suffered to remain, will doubtless be more and more disadvantageous."[1] They specify these defects: (1) That there was no "effectual provision" for carrying church discipline to a "final and peaceful issue;" (2) that appeals in church discipline to councils brought "inefficiency and positive hindrance;" (3) that if his church fail to bring an unworthy pastor to trial before a mutual council, there was no way to deal with him; (4) that the case was even worse with an uninstalled pastor; and (5) that the way of dealing with offending churches was also defective, to say nothing of the need of a uniform creed, and of defining the character of ministers and churches that should be called on councils.[2] Their manual to remedy these defects fell still-born—a fine specimen of blind reverence by the churches for the Platform of their fathers.

A committee of the National Council reported in 1880, enumerating "five classes of ministers not covered by the [then] present rules for calling councils in cases of delinquency."[3] Councils for ordination, installation, dismissal, and organizing churches, as safeguards of purity, proved inadequate when "the coercive power of the magistrate" was withheld. The pivotal plank of the Cambridge Platform had been removed, the churches outside of Connecticut would not replace it with a better, and no wonder discipline became incomplete and lax.

DISTRUST AND UNION EFFORTS.

The inefficiency we have mentioned led naturally to distrust of our polity and thus to union efforts. Our polity was regarded as unfit for fields where its law and usage had not been burned into the thinking of men. True, the "Plan of Union" of 1801 was proposed by the ministers of Connecticut, where a remedy had been sought in Consociationism, which

[1] Report on Congregationalism, pp. 10, 11, 12, 14.
[2] Report, pp. 14, 16, 17, 18.
[3] Minutes, pp. 85, 95.

embraced Presbyterial authority. If the "Plan of Union' was born of that Presbyterian element, it was still the grandchild of the church-state; for Consociationism came as a remedy of defects caused by the growing separation of church and state. So great had grown the distrust of our polity without state support, that "men for many years went forth" from our oldest theological seminary, founded in 1808, "instructed that the Congregationalism of New England lacked some of the very elements which Presbyterianism offered, and that, at any rate, 'it was best for Congregationalists to become Presbyterians when they moved to the West.'"[1] Under such distrust of our principles, it is no wonder that many Congregational churches—two thousand and more[2]—joined presbyteries and were lost to us, though planted with our money and by our missionaries. The American Home Missionary Society, then a union society, for the same reason, and because the Plan of Union of 1801 was one-sided,[3] played into the hands of Presbyterianism. Ministers and churches were expected, almost required, to join presbyteries. They were told "that while Congregationalism did well enough for New England, it was not adapted to the recent settlements of the West"[4]—a sad chapter to be read by sons of Pilgrims and Puritans. Their golden opportunity was given away, because the children would not correct the blunders of the founders of New England, even when clearly pointed out. Environed with this distrust, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, though organized, in 1810, as a Congregational board, hastened, in 1813, to become a union society. Our churches by union with the state, then by refusing to correct the evils of that union, or correcting them by introducing a

[1] Dexter's Congregationalism, p. 304.

[2] Minutes of the Michigan City Convention (1846), p. 34.

[3] Union Efforts between Congregationalists and Presbyterians: Results and Lessons. By A. H. Ross. 1889. Pp. 19.

[4] Congregational Quarterly, Vol. ii. p. 192.

foreign element, sold their birthright to the northern states for nothing.

VOLUNTARY SOCIETIES.

Union efforts sought voluntary channels. But, apart from this, voluntary societies came logically from the church-state. If churches, as such, were incompetent to conduct their necessary pecuniary affairs, but needed a town, and then a parish for each, to transact all such business; then, of course, the churches could not unite and by chosen representatives conduct missionary and educational operations. It were preposterous for churches which could not do so secular a thing as to pay their pastors' salaries, to be deemed competent to carry on vast missions at home and abroad. So, instead of representative boards, elected and controlled by the churches, the normal Congregational way, there arose voluntary societies for the several departments of labor, dependent on the churches only for contributions,—some close, self-perpetuating corporations, and others constituted on a money basis, the right to vote therein depending on the gift of a small specified sum at one time. Some of them have of late admitted in part the representative principle; but, taken as a whole, they present a strange medley, in violent contrast with the principles of Congregationalism.[1]

CREDAL TESTS OF MEMBERSHIP.

We cannot regard it as far-fetched to say that the putting of elaborate creeds as tests of admission into our churches is due indirectly to the church-state in New England. By their Platform of 1648, the churches relied on the power of the magistrate for purity; then, as that power began to fail, on councils of organization, ordination, and installation; and they feared associations of churches meeting statedly for fellowship and consultation. Then, too, the

[1] See The Church-Kingdom, pp. 315–323; Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. xlvii. pp. 529–548.

town and parish relieved them of all their secular and pecuniary responsibilities, rendering them feeble in counsel and action. Each stood alone, its financial burdens borne by the parish, giving little or nothing to benevolence and missions, called occasionally on councils whose scope was limited by the letters missive, when suddenly, like lightning from a clear sky, heresy came upon them. What could they do? They were unused to consultation and co-operation. Protection on that side did not comport with their notions or their practice. So they did the easiest thing, if not the only thing, open to them,—put a creed at the door of each church, as a policeman, to keep out the heresy. To it all must assent, children as well as the mature. Had the churches then been united in associations meeting statedly, as they probably would have been but for the state connection, apostasy might have been as rare in Massachusetts as it was in Connecticut; or, if it appeared, the creed could have been placed at the door of the associations, as the covenant of fellowship, to exclude unsound churches and ministers, where such creeds properly belong. But they had no comprehensive fellowship at all; so they put the guard at the wrong door; denying therein a law of Christianity itself, announced by them in 1648, and reaffirmed later, in 1865, in these words: "The weakest measure of faith is to be accepted in those that desire to be admitted into the churches, because weak Christians, if sincere, have the substance of that faith, repentance, and holiness which is required in church-members; and such have most need of the ordinances for their confirmation and growth in grace. . . . Such charity and tenderness is to be used, as the weakest Christian, if sincere, may not be excluded nor discouraged."[1] This eminently Christian rule for the admission of members was set aside, and the most stringent credal test ever employed substituted for it, by churches that had once and

[1] Cambridge Platform, Chap. xii. sect. 3.

again rejected plans for their protection, after the magistrate had been relieved of the duty. Rejecting all other methods, they, in their panic, adopted one which is both unscriptural and forbidden by the Platform they revered.

LOSS OF POPULAR FAVOR.

In themselves the churches were democratic; in their respective towns and parishes they were aristocratic, possessed of special privileges, as we have shown. Other churches were intruders. It is safe to say that no body of men, however good, can long enjoy special privileges without acquiring an air of superiority, or without losing favor with the excluded. The churches of New England escaped neither the air of superiority nor the alienation of the people, both of which still linger, in some degree, to hinder their work. Those taxed for the support of the established churches, who could neither vote nor hold office in the town or colony, because not members of such churches, naturally chafed under their burdens and disabilities. They contrasted the lofty bearing of such churches with that of their Head, who was "meek and lowly in heart." Besides, churches supported by town taxes do not feel the need of conciliation, of winning the people outside, who in New England constituted the great majority of the inhabitants. So the established Congregational churches, possessed of the field and having the state behind them, alienated the mass of the people. At the first they were universal and supreme. Eighty years after the landing of the Pilgrims, there were seventy-seven Congregational churches in Massachusetts, besides thirty or forty Indian assemblies of the same order; but only three other churches and a Quaker meeting-house, —twenty-six to one. "At the same date, 1700, there were thirty-five churches in Connecticut, six in New Hampshire, and two in Maine; all of them Congregational. In Rhode Island there were two or three Baptist churches."[1] One

[1] Clark's Congregational Churches of Massachusetts, p. 109.

hundred and fifty years later, in 1850, there were in Massachusetts sixteen hundred and twenty-five churches of all sorts.[1] Excluding the sixty-four Roman Catholic churches, and the ninety-six Unitarian churches that lapsed from the faith, the Congregational churches constituted almost exactly one-third of the remainder. How shall this great fall, in a century and a half, from a majority of twenty-six to one to a minority of one-third, be accounted for? Polity does not explain it, in whole or in part; for the Baptists, who are strict Congregationalists in polity, rose from two churches to two hundred and sixty-six in the same time, and have since about held their relative place throughout the whole country. It was due to the state connection, the aristocratic bearing, the popular disfavor, and the want of evangelistic spirit and methods consequent thereon.

LEGAL EXPEDIENTS.

While stoutly contending for the right of each church under Christ to manage all its affairs, and while exercising that right through the magistrates of the respective towns, and through the deputies in the General Court, all elected by the churches; it was natural in founding a school, that the churches, constituting the state, should act through their chosen representatives in the General Court, and make for it an appropriation,—"the first body in which the people [i. e. church-members, a mere fraction of the people], by their representatives, ever gave their own money to found a place of education."[2] Afterwards Harvard College naturally passed from church to state connection and corporate control, until it became, like so many parishes, hostile to the faith that founded and nurtured it. But when its defection led to the founding of a theological

[1] Clark's Congregational Churches of Massachusetts, p. 282.

[2] Edward Everett, quoted in Palfrey's History of New England, Vol. i. p. 548.

seminary for the training of ministers, it is strange that the leaders did not recur to the action of the churches in founding Harvard College, and so make the piety of the churches the guardian of its faith, polity, and bequests. Instead, they resorted to legal expedients, went to Egypt for help, as did Judah.[1] They tried to hedge the school about by creed and subscription and visitors, as well as trustees, so that no one could leap over or crawl through the legal fences. We say nothing on the occasion or merits of the recent attempt to apply these guards; but the expense, and delay, and disappointment experienced by the friends of these legal expedients, must convince them that the original safeguard of Harvard—the churches—would have been better. But reliance on the state had then become a habit too strong to allow a return to Christ's appointed guardians, had the churches then been organized into local and state associations.

SLOW ORGANIC DEVELOPMENT.

When our fathers planted churches independent under Christ, all Christendom,—Greek, Roman, Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian,—except Holland, refused to tolerate them. They stood alone in defence of a church order which, if it succeeded, had in it the death of other polities, and was itself a return in principle to what is now generally conceded to be the apostolic church order. Those independent churches were wisely jealous of their liberties. They guaranteed them by civil law, as has been shown. In becoming identified with the state, state courts became also ecclesiastical tribunals. "Thus, when the General Court took cognizance of ecclesiastical affairs, it was but the whole body of the church legislating for its parts; and this with the important peculiarity, that all the legislators by whom the church exercised its supreme power were of the laity. The system had

[1] Isa. xxxi. 1.

no element or resemblance to prelacy or presbytery. It was pure democracy installed in the ecclesiastical government."[1] So long as this state of things lasted, there was no need of stated synods or associations of churches, they had them, with power, in the General Courts. The ministers, not meeting in these annual courts, soon formed stated associations for consultation and improvement.[2] The need also of local church associations was felt; for as early as 1641, to prevent "errors and offences," and to promote "brotherly communion," there was put into "the body of laws," adopted by the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, provision for the stated meeting of "ministers and elders of the churches near adjoining together, with any other of the brethren."[3] Had this permissive law been followed, the history of organic Congregationalism would have been different.

During the long period of struggle to retain their special privileges, from supreme control in the seventeenth century to entire separation of church and state in New England in the nineteenth century, no successful effort was made to combine our churches in organizations meeting statedly. For a century and a half, they contended for a losing cause without organization. When their battle for prerogatives was lost, and our churches had no further hope of state help, they began to look to one another in conferences or associations without authority. The earliest in New England, as we have shown elsewhere,[4] was the Brookfield Association, 1821; the next year the State Convention of Vermont so altered its constitution as to admit laymen. The National Council was organized in 1871; and twenty years later the first International Congregational Council was held in Lon-

[1] Palfrey's Hist. of New England, Vol ii. p. 40.
[2] Congregational Quarterly, Vol. ii. p. 203 *seq.*
[3] Felt's Ecclesiastical History of New England, Vol. i. p. 440.
[4] The Church-Kingdom, pp. 296–298, 306–311.

don. Effective organization of Congregationalism in the line of local church activity, of associated evangelization, of associated advice, and of church fellowship, was therein presented;[1] but the record reveals a slow development, due, in part, and we believe largely, to the state connection of our churches in New England.

RETARDED DENOMINATIONAL GROWTH.

The persistent resistance to disestablishment, fighting it at every step to the last; the consequent demoralization in discipline and courage; devout reverence for the customs and methods which had all along alienated the great body of the people; a distrust of their polity so deep that desertion from it was constantly advised in influential quarters; the consequent union efforts which not only helped other denominations, but actually transferred over two thousand Congregational churches to them; the feeling, thus engendered and still widely prevalent, that no church can be hopefully planted in western, and much less in foreign, fields, unless there is found existing there already "a congregational element," that is, a nucleus of previously trained Congregationalists; the want of the evangelistic spirit and methods everywhere belonging to state established churches —these are enough to answer the question, which a correspondent of *The Guardian*, the organ of the Anglican Church asks; namely, "Why has Congregationalism in the United States, which had the start and the ground, allowed all the newer organizations to outstrip it?"[2] This question is pertinent. We had the start and the ground; we threw them away. Why? As late as 1776, in wealth and power our churches were far in the lead, though even then the persecuted Baptists outnumbered them; but, in 1890, they stand sixth among Protestant denominations in

[1] International Congregational Council, 1891, pp. 104–107.

[2] Quoted in The Andover Review, Vol. xvi. p. 293.

the United States, the Methodist having eleven times as many churches and nine times as many communicants, while the Baptists have ten times as many churches and over eight times as many members. The *Andover Review* indeed says: "Congregationalism is proving itself a conserving and saving force in the rush of immigration into the newer states; and its growth there, as compared with its previous growths, is phenomenal; and this later growth, it is to be remembered, is *religious*, not chiefly educational or political.[1]

Our retarded growth as a denomination is mainly due, we believe, to the church-state in New England, and its direct and indirect results. And its recent more rapid growth is due mainly, we believe, to emancipation, in part, from the impediments we have given; to the stated fellowship of our churches in conferences and associations; to the cessation of union efforts, which have always ended in failure;[2] and to the freedom inherent in our polity, so in harmony with this democratic age. When our free polity strips itself of its remaining hindrances, inherited from its connection with the state, American Congregationalism will clothe itself with the power and growth of the primitive churches. Its liberty, purity, and efficiency will commend it.

[1] Vol. xvi. p. 293.

[2] Union Efforts between Congregationalists and Presbyterians: Results and Lessons. A Pamphlet.