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CONGREGATIONALISM IN RELATION TO SCHOOLS AND BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES.

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EVERY Christian person has some thought of doing good to his fellow-men, and of helping to set up the kingdom of God in the world. He begins naturally with those nearest to him, in his own home and neighborhood, and does for them what he can. It is an individual work, largely; yet it is not carried on in separation from all social agencies and organizations. He is in a household from the first, and in the midst of the established relations of neighborly life. His Christian feelings and activities run in these channels. He is a Christian child, brother, or father, and a good Christian neighbor. And if he finds any one else with a like purpose trying to do some good, he falls in with him and they work together. These are the first natural and Christian associations of life. Through this sympathetic purpose Christian neighbors join together to make an engagement of fellowship in the public worship of God, and in such matters of helpfulness toward each other and of good-will to other men as may be managed most effectively through an association that is regularly ordered and permanent. This is a church, —a group of neighborly men steadily helping each other and helping other men in the things of the kingdom of God.

No one can draw lines marking off with perfect precision these several departments of individual, household, neighborly, and church activity. Some general divisions can be traced, and beyond that it is not necessary to know where

all these bounds should be drawn. They often overlap each other, and are blended together. To the clearest sight they are not like the lines of a surveyor's chart, but rather like the colorings and shadings of a natural landscape. All the fundamental associations of life are in their proper nature supple and vital and free, and not hard and mechanical. A Christian man conducts himself in them by good feeling and good sense both together. He forms habits and follows rules to ends of constant effectiveness and ease. He loves God and his fellow-men, and learns to exercise his love in all ready and practical and sensible ways. He buys coats and shoes for his boys, and speaks with the school children in the street, and talks with the young men as to their plans of life. He sings in meeting if he can, and pays his pew rent cheerfully, and helps form an improvement society, and calls at a neighbor's house where the old family is changing and the evenings are growing lonely. And he sits by his own fireside what he can, and keeps a kindly temper everywhere. And in most cases he does not mind or know whether he does these things as a deacon, or a father, or a friend, or a common man. He takes his place alone, or with others, freely and readily and steadily, and with constant good will and all the good sense he can muster. This free, regular, hearty, practical, and sensible neighborly life is a model in many things for all the associated activity of the world.

The primal relations of civil life are entered upon in a free country in somewhat the same manner. There is the important difference that the observance of certain fixed regulations is made compulsory—it having been found necessary with respect to the public good that this should be so done. But the choice of the Christian man would of itself carry him, for the most part, to the same results. In some lines it carries him further: as in the voting of money for charities and for schools beyond, ordinarily, what the laws

strictly demand. In many cases in civil life a man does not stop to consider whether he is acting as a man or a citizen, meaning to act in a manner befitting to both. And besides, the boundary lines between the fields of public and of individual interest and action are at many points vague and indeterminate: and they are subject to continual change, slowly or swiftly, by pressure one way or the other. And the agitation all along these borders is in our time peculiarly lively, with a range of uncertainties in thought correspondingly large. Thus in these public affairs there is a wide scope of freedom, and a constant call for neighborly and Christian feeling to be exercised with considerate judgment and practical good sense.

The church itself, formed in this good Congregational neighborhood has a wish to show what Christian good will it can to people living round about, near or far off. The church conducts itself as a Christian man does—being able at the same time to do some things that one man alone can not. It looks out into other neighborhoods. It holds out its hand to other churches, and gives grateful recognition to the common purpose and spirit in them. It offers them help in their local work if they need it: or joins itself with them in helping others. It sees a man busied with some needful charity and gives him help in carrying it on. Or it finds a group of men supporting teachers and preachers in a more distant region, and the church sends them money to help maintain those that go. Or it despatches some of its own members, if it can, to go with the others. Or it learns that another company of men is starting a school to train up Christian teachers and preachers, and the church helps maintain the school. The church gets knowledge of all these things in whatever ways it can, through its official agents or by any of its members. And it puts whatever help it has to give wherever the need seems greatest and the prospect most promising. It does its good work by itself or in com-

pany with other churches or other groups of men, as appears most wise. It is ready to go alone, and ready to go with any one else. It is free as to itself and companionable as to others, both at once. And it allows with others all freedom, and welcomes all companionship. So we have a neighborhood of churches each behaving as a good Christian man does among his neighbors. And this is Congregationalism.

The Congregational order of things is natural and comfortable, and in the end effective. It is not formidable to look at, but it is agreeable to be connected with. It is not manageable at one stroke by individual will; but it is persuadable by forces of general reason. It has freedom. It stirs up enterprise and builds up capacity. It exercises and strengthens individual judgment. It listens to all counsels, invites to all fellowship, and yields itself to every hopeful purpose. Congregationalism is not mechanical, but it is lively. It is teachable and tractable. It is pliable towards circumstances. It is responsive to openings and opportunities. It fits itself to the occasions of life, as the tides to the channels of the shore, and it answers as the tides to the powers of heaven.

This movement of Christian life with the churches goes on thus everywhere with a play of freedom and a drawing of sympathy, both together. Each church is independent. No church is careless respecting its surrounding sister churches. None is indifferent to plans of associated enterprise in furtherance of the kingdom of God, anywhere within the reach of its activities. The co-ordination of these two powers of freedom and fellowship is distinctive of Congregationalism. But exact lines of division cannot be drawn here either, as they cannot anywhere else in all the field of associated human life. A certain precedency belongs to the independence of the local church, as to the freedom of the individual man. The determining agency is with the individual. But the attractions of motive and the enforcements of duty

run abroad into the social state. In general terms it may be said that in matters of common interest any church should yield much to the judgment or desire of the churches round about it, and should be slow to withdraw on grounds of its own from the neighborly alliance; and on the other side any body or group of churches should allow great freedom of action to each particular church, and should be slow to regard its decisions in any case respecting itself as making a total breach in the tie of fellowship. Many specifications might be safely made; but the attempt to cover every occasion by exact and decisive statements would not be wise or safe, and it would not be practicable.

Besides, Congregationalism, whatever exactly it is, does not remain exactly the same age after age, nor scarcely year by year. There is nothing of that sort that does. There is not a wide public system or public organization of any variety whatever on the face of the whole earth that does not undergo material, practical changes with the passing of time—or certainly there is none in any enlightened land. Systems differ as to organic capacity for change. Congregationalism is able to admit it with an unusual freedom, and without harm to its essential principles. This is both a mark of its fitness for use by enlightened and progressive men, and a product of its actual use by them. But in this perpetual flux of all human directions, by the nature of things and by its own nature, Congregationalism cannot be treated and pronounced upon as if it were at any point totally motionless and stiff.

And now some clear practical inferences are at hand. We must not stand against all change. Our polity is capable of variation, happily, to fit the large, elastic connections of human society, and to follow the leadings in time of the providence of God. The new ways may be better than the old. But then too they may not be. We must not be overpositive and headstrong in pushing for new things.

The same conditions of flexibility put this caution upon us. We have come thus far by a path not everywhere unbending, over a country not all a level plain. We cannot take one look straight backward and then run the line by our compass sights straight forward. And no more either can we lay off any exact angle or curve, one way or the other, and be sure at once that we have the precise direction. This is as far unreasonable as the other. The ground about us must be looked over. The long, main directions must be kept in mind. And then we must find the best way we can. A good Congregationalist is cautious and patient and hopeful and teachable all at once. He does not go on much by violent and stubborn and decisive and instantaneous certainties. He puts first the good feeling which is at the basis of all Christian living and which he needs the most of all men because he can use it most. And then he means to take counsel of his common sense. These habits of his may not carry him surely along over any one narrow road, but they will lead through a beautiful country and by safe paths.

With respect to its schools, Congregationalism has supported them thus far, for the most part, through the agency of distinct companies of men organized and legally incorporated for the purpose. Comparatively few of our colleges and theological seminaries have been founded or are now maintained by direct act of the churches moving together to that end. Saving in certain distinctively missionary and scarcely Congregational fields, in the South and Southwest, no one of them has been so founded and maintained by action of all the churches throughout the country. In most cases a few quick-minded and large-hearted men, ministers and laymen, have seen the need of such an institution in some locality, and have laid hold on the work and built it. They have done it often at great cost to themselves. They have made known their undertaking more or less widely to

others, and have drawn to themselves what help they might from generous men and from the churches at large. For a considerable period of years there has been an effort to furnish aid more systematically and abundantly in the founding of schools by special societies established for that purpose, of which more will soon be said. And these societies are now very properly requiring that all schools newly set up shall have the approval of some local association of the churches as to the necessity of their existence and the quality of their management, before they shall receive this kind of assistance. But this action of the churches has so far been usually secondary and always local. Passing back, indeed, to early times, we find the first college in the country founded directly by what might be called an organic act of the churches through the Company of the Massachusetts Bay. But that peculiar ordering of church and state relations, judged at the time to be most wise, but scarcely to be regarded as Congregational, has happily passed away. And Harvard College is not now controlled after any very direct and powerful fashion by the Congregational churches.

Taken thus as a whole, our schools are managed by separate groups of men who have in some manner assumed the work for themselves: or who have been appointed to do it through others who have assumed the business before them. They are mostly close corporations. Notwithstanding this heinous name they have prospered fairly and have done their work well. Letting the name drop, it is not easy to see wherein this general plan can be much improved upon. It has freedom to begin with. It calls out individual benevolence, activity, and capacity. It admits of the easy association of like-minded men together: and it brings out the help of churches and individuals from over large districts. If it does not accomplish this last altogether adequately as yet, there is no reason why it may not, and there are hopeful signs that it will. The schools themselves, too, are left, un-

hampered by any general mechanism, to do their work each in its own way. This on the whole is best. One may attain to one variety of excellence, another to another. Or one may have one defect, and the rest may escape it. Persons may choose between them according to their own thought as to which is to be preferred. Merit of any kind and failure have reward or punishment in the giving or withholding of money or of men according, at least, to whatever wisdom our Congregational community may possess. Theological differences can be expressed less sharply, or more easily at any rate and probably more safely, than they could be under any more direct and general and more closely compacted method of organization and management involving all the churches. If a man fears to be contaminated by virulent orthodoxy at Hartford, he may have hope to escape the infection at Andover. His soul may have more of rest. The fires of controversy are scattered in many furnaces, and are not all blazing under a single boiler—and the boiler planted beneath the central floors of our Congregational dwelling-house.

Our schools, in fact, as now ordered give such satisfaction that there is no general demand, nor scarcely any demand at all, for any change in the basis of their government. If there is here and there some discontent, it rests on other grounds, and it has not taken the form of any desire that the schools should be managed directly by all the churches, or by any majority of them.

It is clear too that the churches themselves are losing nothing of any importance through this detached and independent order of school control. They can get such teachers and pastors as they like—if their eyes are opened to know them. And it is well enough that the churches should be expected to be able to open their eyes. Or if comparisons are made, there is no other denomination with a more consolidated organization, nor any other at all, that can bring

forward its roll of educational institutions more full and splendid than ours. There is no sign of failure or of special weakness in our methods in this great line of Christian service. It is to be considered also that of all that Christian men are called upon to do through any variety of wide association together there is nothing more important than this work through the schools. And when we think how effectively on the whole they have fulfilled their office, and without much assistance from any general organization directly of the churches, it must be taken as a signal evidence of the strength of these distinctive forces of Christian freedom and Christian friendliness upon which our Congregationalism mainly rests. The schools were not set out with measurings and markings by a head gardener, nor trimmed all to one pattern. They are great trees whose seeds the winds sowed, and which have grown because the soil was good, and because they have felt the rains and sunshine.

Concerning our benevolent societies nearly the same things may be said. These societies furnish some aid to the schools themselves, as has been observed already. They give a measure of assistance directly to the young men engaged in study. They assist in sending out and supporting, either at home or abroad, the preachers and teachers trained in the schools. And they also render aid by supplying books and papers where they are needed, and by furnishing helps to biblical studies. They carry on in general a missionary work in behalf of the churches in our own country and in other lands.

These societies have had their origin through individual promptings and by the moving of groups of men drawn together by a common purpose. In one case early steps were taken through the agency of an association of ministers of a single State. Not one of them was formed by any direct combined action of the churches; nor by any ecclesiastical

organization, or any representative body standing distinctively for the churches. A considerable amount of benevolent work has been done upon our Congregational field through the distribution of Bibles, books, and tracts by societies not formed or controlled even so much as within the limits of our denomination. But as to those which are ours, they have sprung up and grown thus far chiefly in our own Congregational ways of liberty and friendly co-operation. They have set out upon their work with such means as they could gather, and others, churches and benevolent men, have seen what they were doing and have come to their help with approval and counsels and gifts.

In the main they have done their work effectively. Upon foreign lands, assuredly, no other American churches have accomplished more, in comparison. In the Southern field the same must certainly be true. There has been one most serious misfortune or error, which we all deplore, in the missing of the hold we should have gotten in New York and the newer States beyond in the years when the New England emigration was pouring out upon them. The elastic habit of Congregational thinking took, for a time, too far with many the misguided direction of indifferentism concerning all ecclesiastical forms. And men who felt themselves free to go as they pleased walked of their own accord through the gates into the walled and more strait enclosures of the Presbyterian Church. Other causes contributed to the same result. And there was one underlying condition of the times in New England, the significance of which in this connection has not been thought of enough. The development of Unitarianism began during these critical years of the first great movement of population westward. The churches were dissevered, many of them, or chilled, distracted, and disheartened, and they had less strength or spirit for pushing their polity into the new lands. And there were those who thought that the Presbyterians being sound in doctrine their

friends might be safe in that respect with them. However we look upon it there is no reason to think that the mischief could have been averted merely by some more close compacting together of the churches in their benevolent undertakings, nor in any other like way, unless there could also have been at the same time some general strengthening of attachment to Congregational principles, and some awakening of enthusiasm in their maintenance. The love of independence itself had need to be strengthened, in order that independency in its due measure might not be, as it was with many, undervalued and cast away. But better times followed afterward. Congregationalism has gathered strength in the newer States, and the benevolent societies have carried on in most cases satisfactorily the share of work that fell to them.

As to organization and basis of membership, two general methods have prevailed. Some of the societies have been self-perpetuating bodies. They were made up at first of the original projectors or friends of the undertaking, who associated themselves together and who maintained the numbers desired by choosing from time to time associates and successors from among those who were supposed to be specially interested in the work and well qualified to assist in carrying it forward. In other cases the membership has been continued by a provision that persons, members of churches, by whom or in whose behalf a certain contribution of money should be made to the society, should be constituted members of the society upon a request to that effect accompanying the contribution. Pastors of churches have thus commonly been made members. And the churches have been accustomed to designate others in the same manner, as they saw fit, from among those of their own members who were known to be interested in matters of Christian benevolence.

Of these two methods the second is the more wide and

free. It has also at times been found to be somewhat loose; and provisions have been made designed to guard against the sudden creation of members in large numbers for the purpose of carrying some contested measure. Of both these plans it may be said in general terms that they propose to provide for membership in the society, and for the direction of its affairs, through those who are specially interested in the work the society has to do. They are in theory plans of government of the several societies by contributors and friends. The fact has corresponded in a broad and not very inaccurate way to the theory. In most cases membership has been easily open to any one who has had much care for the work that was being done. Even with those strictly self-perpetuating, except one of them, any person who has taken sufficient interest in the affairs of the society to attend its meetings has been likely soon to find himself chosen to membership. The intention has been to gather in on every side those who would take hold of the business in hand. Making but a single exception, and that only for recent years, there has been little complaint, if there has been any, of a lack of fairness in filling up the membership of the societies. They have been governed by givers and friends, and, practically, by whomsoever might care to have part in their management. This is no bad kind of government for a Congregational missionary society. It is not the perfect, ideal form, which would be according to the combined ratios of love and sacrifice for the cause and of sound managing capacity. But government by bare numbers may not always come nearer the mark.

The systems thus sketched are now undergoing modification by engrafting upon the old forms provisions for the representation of the contributing churches. Such churches are allowed to send delegates, one or more, to the annual meetings, and these delegates are annual members of the society. In some cases delegates from State associations

or conferences are also admitted, but the proportion of such is not large. These changes will be beneficial if they have the effect to awaken a more general interest among the churches in the work of the society. They are in no manner sharp or revolutionary. They are in fact but slight, since there could be before but very few churches that might not make any one of their number, in the case of the societies admitting to membership upon contribution of money, a member of any society not for the year only but for all his life. Yet the new form has its value in offering to all the churches, more plainly perhaps than before, the constant invitation to participate in the work of the society. If the plans now in process of accomplishment are carried on, two of our societies which have heretofore been constituted as close corporations will be united under a constitution providing in a similar manner for membership in part by choice directly from contributing churches. Here will be then a combination of the self-perpetuating method with this new plan of direct representation from the churches. And it will give still an additional variety in organization.

It is to be considered that the sending of delegates directly from the churches goes well with the Congregational principle of local church independence. Any church can give money and send its representative if it pleases: or it can omit to do it. It is not bound up in any mechanism with any other church, one way or another, saving only as it is held by ties of friendship. The plan may have its weakness, in that the meetings of a society held yearly in different parts of the country might be bodies too far unlike in successive years, and might reflect too strongly the opinions prevalent in particular localities. But this is not likely to prove a serious practical evil, especially with the provision alongside for a certain continuing life membership representing all parts of the country.

The election of members in any considerable numbers by State associations or conferences is a somewhat different matter. It leaves particular churches less free. It puts a constraint upon each one to follow in its own action the direction of the majority in the State body: and that in matters which have not hitherto been committed for decision to any associated body of churches. It leaves openings, as all secondary representation does beyond that which is direct and primary, for caucusings and personal intriguings and manipulations. It forwards, so far, the endeavors of that class of beings whose habit it is to squirm to places of supposed distinction by elections of their own suggestion and management. Hitherto our clear and simple Congregational system has not much favored the growth among us of this variety of creature. But they have been seen here and there. And it is better that we should not, if we can help it, provide the nests in which they may further breed. Representation from the local conferences, rather than the State bodies, would be much better in this respect.

But the general movement for representation of the churches, and principally of the individual church, as it has thus far been carried on, promises only good. It is moderate, and manageable. It is experimental and practical. It can be watched, and changed in its details, if it has need to be. It is all the better that there are varieties of plans with the several societies, as they are now partially remodelled. There will be opportunity to see how each may work, and to compare one with another. And matters can be further regulated as occasion may require.

Up to this point there need be little ground for dissatisfaction even on the part of those who are most strongly attached to the present independent features of our polity. But a different prospect is before us, in which we are not merely confronted, as heretofore, by a condition, but threatened with a theory. Much more radical changes are pro-

posed, which ought only to be made, if at all, after the most careful consideration. Plans are set forth in various forms for dispensing wholly with the societies as centres of any separate power, and for bringing all our missionary operations under the control of the churches acting together in some distinct organic capacity. The arguments favoring this new policy have been urged with much vigor, and for the most part, with fairness and good temper, as was to be expected. But occasionally a harsher strain is heard. The harmless or useful modifications already made in the constitution of the benevolent societies have been pushed forward by some, though not by the larger number, with a measure of sharpness and impatience, as if the directing by these societies of the work they have thus far done must be of necessity a wrong to the churches. The churches too are spoken of as having an ownership in the societies or an authority over them, in a manner to imply that these rights or prerogatives rest properly and certainly by the nature of the case in some mass or majority of the churches. Unfortunate complications are also arising from other causes. Theological differences and matters of personal administration have been involved with the more general question of the management of the societies, or of one of them. And altogether the discussions which have gone on have taken upon them sometimes a disagreeable tone, both of decisiveness and of severity. Perhaps the most dangerous feature in the situation is really in this vehement and authoritative temper which is occasionally manifested, and which ought by no means to be suffered to extend itself. Such a disposition, with whomsoever it exists, needs to be met with cooling and sobering reflections; but the scope of this writing leads to the application of such a treatment only in a slight measure, in certain special directions.

It must be kept in mind then that no one can say with absolute positiveness that Congregational principles require

that the churches of the country acting together should manage all missionary enterprises. If any one says that they do, another may say that they do not. Congregationalism certainly has not required it heretofore in this country, since it has not in fact been so done, but something has been done differently. The Congregationalism under which essentially new methods should be followed would be in so far essentially a new Congregationalism. It might be better, or worse, but it would not be the same. The changes to be made might accord with and strengthen some elements in the present Congregationalism, and might disagree with and weaken others. There would be room for question as to whether the general balancings of the system would be rendered more secure or more unstable. Some men have no doubts on such a point. Their vision is perfect. They know what will come to pass, and they can declare it. They can speak promptly, unhesitatingly, definitely, positively, emphatically, and decisively, all at once. But such speech may not be impressive except upon the soul of him who utters it. One does not settle a denominational polity by the having all these conclusive adverbs so fastened to his tongue. Questions are to be determined among us in more careful ways, by steady good-will first of all, along with considerateness and patient good sense.

Commanding words are no better in such a case than words of positiveness. There are men with us who are saying that such and such things shall be done, and without question. The societies shall be subjected to particular measures of control, and there shall be no resistance or delay. But this is not effective upon us. When we hear now and then the roar upon the horizon of these peremptory and resounding "shalls," our hearts may tremble, but we are not persuaded. "Shall," outside its smoother tenses and persons, is a very unreliable Congregational word. The churches shall do as they please, with mindfulness always of the pleas-

ure of all the rest. If any number or a majority of the churches shall please to join together to do a certain work in a certain way, those churches shall do that work in the way that shall please them. If a minority or any other number of the churches shall not please to join in the doing of that work in that way, then they shall not join in it. And the churches that shall so join themselves together shall not, we trust, be displeased with those that shall not.

The suggestion of any majority government here too, as if by any clear right, is altogether misleading. Government by the majority is appropriate wherever men are brought into association together of necessity, as in civil affairs, or wherever besides they may agree to become associated under that condition. But in the case of the Congregational churches there has been made as yet no such agreement. It has not been determined hitherto that all the churches in the country shall engage to carry on their missionary work conjointly and subject to direction by the votes of the major part of the churches, or the church-members. It may be that they will engage to do it, but thus far they have not. It is only very recently that it has been so much as seriously considered. And any engagement by the churches or church-members, whichever it might be, would only be of force for those who should thus make it, unless a totally new principle were to be brought into our Congregational polity. The effect of this principle would be to make the bounds of fellowship among the churches identical with the limits of the association that should thus be formed for the purpose of carrying on the work of missions in the manner indicated. There is an easy deception thus to be guarded against with respect to the application of this ordinarily appropriate mode of government to the benevolent relations of the churches, since it is liable to carry with it, unthought of, the assumption that a body of churches has already been formed needing to be governed in such a way, or in some way. But in fact

there has been thus far, and is, no such body to be governed. And the only government hitherto existing has been a government of neighborly good-will and Christian helpfulness. That the churches might now properly make such an engagement to arrange and conduct all their missionary operations together and under the direction of the larger number of themselves may be true. But that is a matter to be thought of, and a thing to be done consciously and considerately if it is done at all. It is not a thing which should be assumed to have been done when it has not been done. And the effect of such a constitutional change in Congregationalism, though it might be little thought of at first, would be likely to grow to be great.

Until such a change is made and such an agreement reached, no majority of churches has any special right to control in matters of benevolence the action of any other churches, nor of any of the societies which the other churches assist. And no wrong would be done, or grievance caused, by the failure of any society to follow the direction of any churches or majority of churches.

The churches thus far, too, have no ownership in the societies, nor in any of them, except the ownership of Christian good-will and helpfulness. The societies were all formed by individuals, or by groups or voluntary associations of individuals; and they are in this sense, and in every sense, voluntary and not ecclesiastical bodies. Individuals or churches can help them or not as they think best, or they can form other societies, or the societies may choose themselves to be directed by these individuals or churches. But the societies do not belong to them. We do indeed hear it said, and sometimes with an air of final conclusiveness, that since the churches, or some of them, help the societies, and since the societies appeal to the churches for aid, therefore the churches have a right of possession in the societies. This seems remarkable reasoning for men capable of being

Congregationalists. It will apply also to the schools. Our colleges and seminaries appeal to the churches for aid. It is but a short time since a circular from Andover asking earnestly for gifts of money was lying upon our tables. It was altogether proper to send it. But the churches that responded to this appeal are not supposed, we may presume, to have gotten thereby rights of government or possession in the Andover Seminary. This is indeed a peculiar mode of acquisition. One has only to tell the trustees of a school that, since they have asked him for help, and since he has helped them, he will therefore proceed to take charge of the school himself. If this method of getting control of things could be in any way carried into common life, the trade of Dick Turpin could be abolished.

The societies exist by as good a right as the churches do, and by the same right. They are not the creation of the churches, but of the choices of individual men, as the churches themselves are; and they are the product in the same manner of the providence of God in his guidance of men. They are organizations less essential to the progress of the kingdom of God in the world. But while they live they have the rights of life. The question of their continued use is one of expediency and practical wisdom. It should be discussed and decided in these lights, and in no other.

There are obvious advantages connected with the new plans of consolidated management, and they will not fail to be adequately set forth. But there are also difficulties, drawbacks, and risks of mischief that should not be lost sight of. It is not clear what geographical bounds the new organization should cover, as to its constituencies or its fields of operation. As to the home work it would be natural for us to take the country itself. But in the case of the great Home Missionary Society we have now in existence a system of auxiliaries in many States with peculiar and interesting features. It fits well to the political order of things by

which we have States in the nation. Its practical working on the whole is admirable, as putting local wants under local care, and as distributing the administration of affairs largely throughout the country. There is reason to expect that these auxiliary societies will develop still further and increase in efficiency as the newer States are more fully opened and planted with stronger churches. It is doubtful now if the larger contributing States would be willing to put wholly out of their own determination the question of the proportion of funds collected that should be spent within their own limits; and doubtful if it would be wise that they should. And every State should be encouraged in its measure to understand its own necessities and to employ for itself its own resources. It may be possible, but it will not be easy, to make some serviceable copy of the present arrangement under some of the systems proposed. And it is much more likely to be injured than improved.

With respect to work to be done abroad, why should the bound of the missionary constituency be the country? Why should it not be the continent? Or why not the planet? Why should not the common work for the whole world be controlled from over all the earth, and within no lesser limits? Or as to representation in this body to be formed, should each church be represented equally, large or small, and whether it gives much or nothing towards the common cause? And if this is to be so done, is it clear that the actual representation of the giving spirit and force of the churches will be any more exact and fair than it is at present? It is to be remembered also that even as to the self-perpetuating corporations there are not a few benevolent men, and among them some of the very largest givers, who, whether wisely or not, much prefer that form of administration to any other. They have at least an interest for themselves in this judgment of their own. It is everywhere admitted, too, that in the case of the one great example of this

form of association there has been exhibited, at least until recent years, a singular measure of skill and efficiency in the management of its affairs and in the drawing of friends to its aid. Part of the present stringency of the situation comes of this rare ability and success, since, but for the force of the impression thus made upon us all, any churches or men who are uneasy in their existing relations with the society might more willingly and more readily set in motion some other machinery for themselves.

The methods now in use admit of great freedom of personal action, and call forth individual enterprise. This is characteristic of our polity, which makes up in penetrating vivacity of spirit for whatever it misses in orderliness and heaviness of organization. The new plans, fastening all the churches together to their appointed work, could hardly fail to lessen the stimulus put upon individual exertion. Judging from all the conditions, there is no reason to think that any one of the present benevolent societies would have been gotten into operation so promptly as it was if there had been at the time in existence any compacted organization of the churches. They sprang up, as almost every quickening impulse in the kingdom of God has done, through the touch of heavenly motive direct upon the minds of men; and they brought into use from the first such instrumentalities directly about them as a number of men not large might handle. In the very same manner the great Christian Endeavor societies have but just now risen up, and the McAll Mission in France, and, in another range of action, the Salvation Army. They built up their own mechanisms at first hand, what they wanted. No associated body of churches helped them. Great movements make organizations if they need them. Organizations seldom bring forth any great movements.

There is a deceptiveness besides as to the running of all great ecclesiastical mechanisms. They easily seem to be of more value than they really are. It can be seen that they

are in motion: and whatever they do can be known and told of. The sight of steadily concentrated energy is in itself attractive and alluring. So there has been a perpetual tendency setting in these directions, against which it has always been necessary to guard, but in opposition to which the measure of existing watchfulness has often proved too small. The free life has been sacrificed for the seemingly solid movement. The growing plants have been pressed into a dry compact stick: as if a heavy club were of more account than springing blades of corn, or trees with fruit. And from the first ages this desire to be crowding the plants of life into consolidated cudgels has plagued the churches of God.

There is no sure ground of confidence, either, that the more closely compacted systems would have any advantage even in preparing the classifications and laying out the details of benevolent work. One of the most serious errors made by our societies in recent years was in an adjustment of missionary work between the Home Missionary and the Sunday-School and Publishing Society, which was arranged in accordance with the clear "advice" of the National Council. The plan proved so disastrous that, after ample trial, it was abandoned by consent of all concerned, and without help by any suggestion from the Council. The societies went out to make the trial without experience but laden with "advice": they returned empty of "advice" but burdened with experience.

Altogether, and so far as concerns only the effective carrying forward of Christian enterprises requiring co-operation among the churches, there is no reason for not assenting to the mature and weighty judgment of Dr. Dexter, to the effect that "the history of the rise and progress of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the American Home Missionary Society, the American Missionary Association, and their kindred voluntary associations,

through which the members of the American Congregational churches have been and are now co-operating for the spread of the gospel at home and abroad, illustrates the practicableness of reaching every need by such methods: and the superior value in simplicity, economy, celerity, and all general elements of success of their voluntary system over the more strongly ecclesiastical methods of differently organized bodies."[1] We need be in no haste to cast aside the agencies concerning whose effective working such testimony can be borne.

But apart from what is connected directly with the missionary work to be done, the new plans involve risks of serious harm with respect to the general denominational structure itself. Whatever safeguards might be made use of, or whatever limitations might be set, there would not fail to be given a great impulse in the line of all consolidating tendencies. To lodge with central representative bodies the management of great interests must always have an effect of that sort. Such bodies incline themselves, almost of necessity, to the enlargement of their own functions and powers. There would be choices to be made of ends and methods and agencies and of men. There would be involved at many points determinations upon matters of belief. And these would be given with a denominational weight not now anywhere thrown into the scales. All conclusions of every variety that were reached would be practically binding upon the churches to a degree far greater than at present: since they would have a solid denominational force not in them now. It would be far harder for individual churches or men to stand against them, or to go on comfortably without regarding them. The habit of centralized organic action grows and strengthens too with all its exercise, and brings with it constantly increasing constraint. It would almost inevitably follow that we should grow to be a denomination

[1] Handbook of Congregationalism (Boston, 1880), p. 67.

far more strongly governed at many points than we are now. Such a change would be unfortunate in itself. Or, from any point of view, it would be needless. If there are any who wish either to govern or to be governed more strongly than is admissible now with us, there are Christian denominations already formed and stiffly organized in which they can be accommodated. Our plain, neighborly, and brotherly Congregational order is unique and single. There are many who value it as it is. It is suited to a simple, and as we think, a wholesome taste. It would be a pity to spoil it by shaping it into some likeness to productions with which the markets of the world are sufficiently stocked already.

No one must think that this process could go on without involving stringency of some sort in matters of belief. It would be felt in no long time, if not speedily. We should not get these ecclesiastical horses stoutly tackled up into a great wagon, to be driven—no whither. And the wagon would not go without some load. It is likely that in the course of years, if not at first, the general effect of a more closely compacted organization would be toward conservatism as to doctrine. But we should not let our sympathies in that direction disturb our safer judgment with respect to the main proceeding. It is better as to these personal goods that we need to have always close about us, that they should not go in that wagon.

We must not lose sight of the schools. The control of our theological seminaries, if not of our colleges, through some general denominational organism, is most certainly within the logical scope of the movement proposed. The importance of the matter itself is not less. The societies send abroad ministers and teachers, and spread the truth. The schools prepare the ministers and teachers, and furnish, largely, what is sent as truth. This is not a less vital business. The urgency, whether of constraint or freedom, as to how it shall be conducted is not less. If individuals or

groups of men have an undoubted right to found schools, and the churches a right to help sustain them or not, as they please, so the same things are true in relation to the societies. It would be quite as easy a matter to control the schools—those now existing or others—through denominational agencies, as it would be to manage in that way the work of the societies. The sword with which we are asked to play is sharpened on both its edges.

It is true indeed that as to relations subsisting with the churches there are some lines of distinction. But they touch, the most or all of them, upon matters accidental rather than essential or permanent. There is also at present less dissatisfaction and less desire for any change with respect to the control of the schools than with respect to the societies. But this happy condition of things upon that side of our benevolent work is due largely to the very freedom which is exercised in the direction of the schools, and to the almost total absence of anything like ecclesiastical control upon them. This freedom is more complete with the schools than with the societies by reason of the greater ease with which schools can be planted and sustained. But the proper inference is that the measure of liberty and elastic variety in action which does exist in relation to the societies should be by every possible means maintained and exercised: and that it should be enlarged, if it may be, and not diminished in its range. The general comfortable working of the schools shows at least how readily this highly voluntary order of things befits our Congregational polity.

As to that one of our societies concerning which at the present time the most uneasiness is felt, one may hesitate, in view of all the complications that have arisen, in undertaking to say what should be done. There are many among those holding conservative opinions who think that a somewhat more liberal policy might have been followed with respect to the sending abroad of young men with

questionable or wavering theological beliefs, without serious harm to the missions or serious offence to the most sound sentiments of the churches. And if the more lax beliefs even in their lighter form do indeed "cut the nerve of missions," then it might be expected that no very large number of those entertaining them would desire to become missionaries. But in the present stage of the matter, though it might have its uses, it is not clear that any change of policy within the limits of safety would restore the harmony that once existed. And somewhere the lines must be drawn.

The plans for a representation of the churches in the Board through nominations from the State associations or conferences, are not violent in the changes they propose: and if they should prove to be in the end revolutionary, the overturning would not be rapid. But it is not certain again that the results would be satisfactory on either side. Apart from anything that has to do with our order of polity, we cannot shut our eyes wholly to the fact that grave differences of belief exist among us. If they should continue to go on and deepen, the time would soon come when it would not be possible to carry forward our foreign missionary work under any one management, whatever it might be. Men of every shade of belief have each the fullest right to go abroad as missionaries: and the right to receive assistance from all that wish to give it. But no one has any right to insist upon going in company with any other person to whom his presence is not agreeable or helpful. And no one can have any claim for assistance from those whose beliefs his teachings would largely contradict or set aside. There are rights of solitude and separation as well as of companionship. The Congregational denomination itself would fall wholly apart under a continuing and sharply intensifying strain of theological dissensions. We all desire so far as we may to turn aside from every such prospect.

If some divisions or distributions could be made in our

foreign work, giving play more freely to individual effort, and to the plannings of groups of men, there would be afforded some relief at least along the line of greatest tension. It might prove a permanent remedy if, as we hope, the discordance among us is not greatly to increase. Every one understands the advantages in many ways which have attended the prosecution of our foreign work under a single agency. We should regret the losses that would occur with any form of division. But as an escape from worse evils separations of some sort are proper to be thought of.

The formation of a new society by those not satisfied with the workings of the Board would not be wholly calamitous. There would be some additional cost of administration, but it might be met by much larger income. There would be some degree of embarrassment as to the division of contributions which have thus far gone to one treasury. But this could be arranged with no great difficulty, as was done in many churches at the time of the formation of the American Missionary Association—which in its day proved to be no calamity. But all such frictions of every sort could be but slight compared to the heavier jars that now alarm us. It would be no strange thing if the receipts of the old Board should continue fully up to the present mark, so that all that should be done by the new organization could be counted as clear gain. The field abroad might be amicably divided. Suppose the new society should take Japan to begin with? Some leadings of Providence may be pointing to that. The prospects on the ground are promising. Let the new theology take that land: and let it overflow, if it will, upon the continent beyond. Let there be no strife between us and them, or between our missionaries and their missionaries. Is not the whole earth before us? If one of us will go to the left hand, the other may go to the right. And is not all Japan well-watered everywhere, even as the garden of the Lord? If the younger nephew will choose that most

fair and fruitful plain, the elder Abraham, under all the circumstances, should be willing to stay upon the less luxuriant highlands. And with such friendly separations left open to be made, it is not certain that it would be needful or wise to make any essential change in the constitution or the general policy of the Board.

We may fail to consider how much nearer all the earth has been brought to us since our foreign missionary work began, and how much more easily we can pass out upon all lands. Tourists go round the circle of all continents and seas, counting lightly the days. Commercial houses have their branches or their correspondents on all shores. We may have been slow to follow with a like vivacious spirit of Christian enterprise. We may have waited too far for others, and for movements of great combinations. Mexico and the South American States are almost at our doors, and they are drawing yearly nearer. Nothing in distance or hard approach need hinder planting great schools or branch churches in those lands, if we were ready to do it. We can get at the world if we wish to. We have thought, to be sure, that it was safer to commit our gifts mostly to the care of some wide-looking and well-known and thoroughly responsible agency; and this may still be true for the larger part. But there are other modes of watchfulness that may be made available; and the smaller enterprises, with their closer individualisms, may have some fuller use than in the past, and may answer in some things better to the changing and quickening times. The earth at least is open and close at hand; and it need not be reckoned a sheer debarment from entrance, nor in any wise an utter grievance, if some men should go out in a particular association together while all the rest may go in any way besides as they choose.

There was a notable instance not long ago of the sending a missionary abroad by a particular church in an Eastern city. The step seemed bold. Many thought it ill-ad-

vised; and some special circumstances connected with it gave rise to a measure of unfavorable comment. But waiving all question of these, the main proceeding was surely not un-Christian nor un-Congregational. It was a reversion to Congregationalism in its original type. Thus the Congregational church at Antioch sent forth its missionaries, Paul and Barnabas. Yet it is not clear that they were sent even by any formal action of the church. It is certain that there was no council nor body of churches concerned. Paul was not the agent of churches. He was the maker of churches. The great apostolic Congregationalist went forth, called of the Holy Ghost and followed with prayer and blessing by the company of Christian believers, and the churches of Asia and of Europe flashed into life where he set his steps. Organizations came afterward. Christian men of other denominations got all these churches well tethered together, and drove them on in solid organic form down the heavy roads, with the harnessing straps drawn across their eyes. But that trim and smoothly-handled order of procession has been much broken up in these later times, and the churches have gone on again, numbers of them in a goodly company, as men with sight restored and able to walk and leap and give thanks for themselves to God. They can go now or send where and whom they will and as the Spirit moves them; as was done from Antioch.

The brief record tells us too that there were in the church at Antioch "prophets and teachers, . . . Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the foster-brother of Herod," along with Barnabas and Paul; so that the enterprise began according to what has become an accustomed manner in Christian awakening and enlargement, with a group of men praying and conferring together and stirred by the Spirit of God. So our American Board began. This way of successful undertaking in things small or great

is still open wherever two or three of kindred purpose may be found to enter it. And if one like Paul were again among us, and if our Board were to refuse to send him forth to the missionary fields within its charge—if the supposition may be made—we cannot easily picture him to ourselves as a whit disheartened or set back from going. The Missionary Board, moving or standing, does not block all the highways of the earth. And that any of us forming a body of considerable numbers should be profoundly concerned to go abroad only by its conveyance and hopelessly cast down if we failed of passage by it, is as if an army of men marching on the Western plains were to crowd and push to walk by a single buffalo track, or were to sit down by great companies in despair if their luggage were not to be put all upon a single wheelbarrow. The comparison does a wrong to the accomplishing capacities of the great society, but it does not exaggerate the weakness that would appear with us. We could march over open fields to the conquest of the globe if we had a mind to go, and if the fire of war were in us.—If these sentences convey an admonition concerning the spirit by which we are moved, the writer of them desires to take to himself a larger measure of reproof than he would be willing to put upon any of his brethren.

And now there may be with us many unlike views respecting the exigencies of the present time, or concerning measures of relief or steps of progress. But from our place as Congregationalists, as we look abroad in anywise widely about us we must all have thoughts of gratitude and courage. We are free toward all opportunities. Shining providences have gone before us. The earth is full of the glory of the Lord, as believing men have seen it—a glory which all the faithful have helped to shed upon it. We have ourselves some stock of Christian forbearance and human sense. We observe the distinguishing principles of our denominational order, clear

and gracious wherever they are seen in full action. We consider our rights, our independence, our fellowship, all in one circle of thought. We mind but little of rights except for liberty that we may do good to one another. We care but little for independence only that we may be more free to go comfortably together. And we value nothing in fellowship saving as each of our brethren may walk of himself in all the light that falls truly on him. We shall live together in patience and thankfulness and hope. Our forms we make for use and not for observation. Our methods are for powers and for paths to walk in, and not for walls about us or for weights upon us. We shall not ride much upon horses; nor call the work of our hands our gods. We shall grow as in the springtime, by forces both gentle and strong. The Most High Himself will be unto us as the dew unto Israel. Our Congregational branch shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.